

The Final Draft

Literary Journal



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The Final Draft

L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

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The Final Draft Literary Journal

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Short Fiction

The Sole Reason

JANICE RAYE STUART

The com-phone chirped across the room but Emma did not feel like answering. After a half-dozen chirps, she realized the recorder was not on, so she called her answer from where she sat, activating the phone. "Yes, this is Emma."

"Emma, this is Jillian. Are you all right?"

"Yes, the doctor will be back tomorrow."

"I'm sorry, Emma. Does Andrew know?"

"No, he won't be back for two days."

"I'll get John to send a sat-communication to him. Maybe he can shuttle back from the Terra-forming plant tomorrow."

"Thank you," Emma offered weakly. "Tell Peg and Ryan that Mama loves them. They can come home tomorrow after the procedure."

"They're sweet kids, Emma. No problem. I'll send someone to check on you later."

"No, I'll be all right."

"Sure, Hon. Talk to you later." The com-phone clicked, leaving Emma to listen to the wind whipping outside the modular home. She could nearly hear the minuscule bits of sand tapping a beat along the plasti-tech siding.

Emma ran her fingers over her rounded abdomen, swollen from five months pregnancy, then she reached up and wiped at the new stream of tears running down her cheek. She mopped at the wetness and closed her eyes. How could the baby be gone? She had felt him stir only a few days before. The lightening within her had renewed the joy she felt as the days passed, especially since the first few months of sickness had begun to wane.

Abruptly the face of the med-tech reappeared in her mind's eye, his face saddened by the news he had to convey. The baby had died some time ago. No heart beat, no stirring of any kind. The sonogram was clear; none of the fetus' organs were functioning. Emma shuddered with the facts he had recited.

Pulling her long brown hair to one side, Emma began to twist it nervously between her fingers. She crossed the room to the large window that faced the southern mountains a few kilometers away. The sky was beginning to darken as the Carelian sun sank behind them, casting a set of rounded shadows over the gray desert between the settlement and the sheer walls of rock that was the northern face of the range.

For an absent moment, Emma traced her fingers over the shapes on the Plexiglas. Caelian IV was such a barren world. She glanced down at her abdomen, great under the thin material given to her by one of the natives. The Nirveli had dug the roots of the long grass that grew in one season, only a few days long, and spun the silky thread from them. After the brief time for

growth, the desert returned to its barren state. Barren. There was no hope the engineers could ever bring life back to this world. Her hands fell to her sides.

Hers was to be the first born in this world. A landmark every human colony celebrated with pride and joy. There would be none for this settlement. None of the other women, who had been here more than a year longer than her six months, had been able to conceive. One of the scientists had even speculated that the magnetic fields were too intense. Then she and Andrew managed to create a life, making them wonder what was so different about her. The doctor and med-techs followed the pregnancy very closely. Everything looked perfect, so very perfect for a normal birth. Emma sagged down on the hard sofa under the window and began to cry once more. After a time, she wept herself to sleep.

"Amma? Missus Amma?" a voice hummed nearby.

Emma jerked with the intrusion, awakened from the pleasant dream she was having. But as she pushed herself up, which was difficult with the weight of her pregnancy, Emma remembered her loss. A new flood of tears began.

"Missus Amma, are you in pain?" the voice, now familiar, asked in singsong music.

Emma blinked to see the figure a few feet away. The room was dimly lit by a single candle, so she could not make out the Nirveli native clearly. The small humanoid stepped closer carrying the light, which lit his bronze face enough for her to see the green markings he bore across his forehead and broad, three-nostril nose. The shapes reminded her of the simple v's her daughter sometimes drew as flower leaves. "No, Vadin, I do not hurt."

"Med-tech told me that your baby is gone."

Emma nodded, unconsciously rubbing her hand over her abdomen. "The baby is dead."

"Doctor come to help baby tomorrow?"

Emma's eyes widened with his question. She felt a brief rush of anger, though she understood his ignorance. "No, he cannot help the baby. My baby is dead."

"Dead." Vadin spoke the word without a hum. His narrow eyes, brown with white pupils seemed to expand as he touched his forehead with his long fingers. The Nirveli were nearly human in shape, save their odd markings and thin frames. They wore a single green braid that flowed from the top of their heads, filled with the large knots they made to celebrate each full year. Vadin had nearly a hundred along the braid that made its way down his back past his buttocks. He wore a single piece of clothing, a sleeveless tunic that just covered his backside. The thin material was designed for the hot climate. His rough skin was weathered by the wind-swept sand dust that would blow out of nowhere at any time of the day. He knelt down on the rug in front of her and set the candle between them. "This is dead like man who was crushed by rocks that fell from mountain?"

"Yes, his soul is no longer here."

"Soul?" Vadin asked, his eyes wide with confusion.

Emma pushed her hair back and rubbed her wet cheek. "Soul. I

believe your word is *tulpa*."

"*Tulpa*," he sang. His head nodded quickly. "Nirveli *tulpa* do not die."

"We also believe our souls do not die. They merely pass from our physical being."

Vadin's lips formed an O over and over, like a fish trying to breathe. Emma recognized the laugh, something rarely seen in the few Nirveli that had made contact with the settlers. "And where do your *tulpa* go? Do they fly back to human Earth?"

"No, they go to a place for souls. We call it heaven."

Vadin looked out the window behind Emma and stared hard. He lifted a single thin finger and pointed at the dark sky filled with numerous stars. "Heaven must be lonely place for so few human souls."

Emma glanced back at the dark sky. "No, not the sky. It is a special place for souls."

"Special place?"

"Yes, one were there is no pain, no suffering. The soul is happy."

"But would soul not be more happy to be here with those who care for him?"

Smiling at his logic, Emma again touched her abdomen. "It would seem so, but the soul cannot choose when it leaves."

The Nirveli's white pupils expanded as his eyes narrowed. "But *tulpa* can choose." Vadin stood and held out his thin hand. "I can show you, Missus Amma."

Emma looked into his eyes, whose pupils were huge in the near darkness. They seemed to call, to draw her in like a plea, like the outstretched hand.

"All right, Vadin. Maybe it'll do me good." She stood up and took his hand.

The site where her husband Andrew studied Nirveli culture was a short walk away, but in the dark and blowing sand, Emma moved slowly behind the smaller native. Her coat and hood were drawn tightly against the wind, her goggles switched to infrared night vision. Finally, they stopped at the stone structure that stood at the edge of the valley that stretched to the mountain walls. Andrew said it might have been a temple or government building. It stood like the silhouette of a bleached eggshell, seven stories high.

The Nirveli would not offer any information to solve its mystery, so Andrew, the colony archeologist, had spent the past six months studying the interior, which was barren save for the markings on the walls and support columns. Sometimes she came to help him dust the walls, cleaning the markings as he took readings and notes. The symbols did not fit what they knew of the Nirveli tongue, so he and the computers were only able to compute intelligent guesses. But a few weeks into her pregnancy, she had stopped coming.

The building began to make her feel odd inside, to the point she felt fear and physically shook from it. Now, as she stood a few feet away from its entrance, she was beginning to feel a calm, a peace from its presence.

Tentatively, she touched the cold stone with her fingers. "I used to feel so afraid of this place. Afraid for my child," she whispered.

"And how do you feel now, Missus Amma?" Vadin asked.

Emma looked at the Nirveli, then back at the oval building. "Calm. Safe."

"And one should who will bring life to world," Vadin hummed as he opened the door by touching the stone at one side which operated the sliding panels. "Here lies the way to renewal," he recited as he led her over the threshold.

It was darker inside than outside. The three moons shed enough light to read by outside in the desert, but their light did not penetrate the transparent dome at the top of the building. The material had been a puzzle to the engineers who had studied it. Emma stared at the clear, star-filled sky above. As they stepped through the door, Vadin spoke a single word, and the huge chamber beyond was softly illuminated.

Inside, Emma peeled off her outer clothes and followed Vadin through the room until they faced the back wall. Andrew's measurements had revealed this particular wall to be several meters thick which made the room appear as if the back wall were sloping inward toward the center. It was covered with a large number of markings, so Andrew had spent most of his time researching it closely. Vadin touch several points on the wall, mouthing words in his native tongue. Emma recognized the reverent action and smiled as she realized that Andrew had been nearer to the truth than he thought. She closed her eyes for a moment and remembered the prayers said during a pilgrimage her parents had taken to Jerusalem.

Vadin leaned his head backward as if trying to read the scripts that circled from a central point and spiraled outward. His eyes moved with the swirling motion of the symbols. A single mark in its center looked like a sun, but Andrew had merely assumed that since the planet was so barren from its hot star. Emma unsuccessfully disputed his hypothesis, but her specialty was music and her ideas only based on intuition. For that sole reason, she no longer tried to discuss Andrew's work.

After a moment, Vadin turned to Emma and smiled with the Nirveli 'oh.' "Missus Amma, did I tell you about Ama, the mother goddess of our world?"

"No, Vadin," she answered softly. "Does she take care of the *tulpa*?"

"Yes, Ama cares for them until they find their mothers, the women who bear them to the world."

"Ama?" She repeated the word that he spoke with an accent, the same word she thought he mispronounced as her name.

He smiled again. "Yes, I thought it supremely wonderful that you carry her name."

"And does Ama live in this place?" She indicated the chamber.

"Do you believe your god to dwell in one place?" he retorted.

"No, Vadin, I don't, so I guess Ama doesn't either."

"Here is place of life. My sole reason for existing. Here is the place of coming, place where life will be renewed. So say the words of our mother," he recited, his fingers swirling in the air toward the stone imprint.

Vadin stretched his arm out and begin to follow the motion of the spiral. His lips worked silently and quickly as if he were reading the symbols while his arm swept in ever-broadening circles, his throat throbbed with a hum that grew louder with his sweeping arm.

The cool room began to feel warmer, then Emma realized the huge wall was starting to glow a pale green color, heating as it did. She backed away and stared in amazement, then fear, as she understood what the Nirveli had refused to tell them. She continued to move away until she was stopped by a large console Andrew had placed a few meters from the wall. Her mind raced with Vadin's movement, keeping her backed against the large piece of equipment.

Vadin's hum ended with a shout, and the wall faded from green to pink until it stopped glowing and became transparent. Emma's eyes widened as she saw the outer wall, the same white eggshell as the outside. From the place where the wall of symbols had stood to the outer wall lay spheres that glowed with shimmering and shifting colors. As she took in the sight, Emma began to walk toward the translucent barrier. When she was close enough, she stretched her hand out, but was intercepted by Vadin.

"What do you see, Missus Amma?" he asked softly.

"I don't know," she said, her eyes still focused on the numerous spheres beyond. "I just want to touch them."

"It is place where *tulpa* wait."

"Why are they waiting?" Without his answer, Emma broke away from the sight and looked down at her extended belly. She ran her fingers lightly over the bulge. "Because they have nowhere to go. No place safer than this," Vadin answered.

Emma looked at him. "And no one may touch them?"

"Only if they wish to be touched." He looked beyond the wall.

Emma took a deep breath. *Tulpa*. Her child's *tulpa*. Gone forever. No place safer than this. She stretched her hand out to touch the barrier. As her fingers grazed its surface, she felt drawn until she stepped through to the other side.

The place was filled with spheres, mostly grouped in threes or fours, but Emma noticed a single sphere apart from the others. She walked slowly until she was close to its soft blue color, then she sank to the floor beside it. Gently, she ran her fingers over the surface, which hummed and vibrated yet had no solidity she could feel. It called to her, and she smiled at the song that filled her mind.

"What's going on, Vadin?" Andrew shouted from the entrance. He pulled his outerwear off as he crossed the room angrily. His feelings for Emma were taking away any excitement of finding the wall's transformation or the multi-colored spheres beyond. All he could see was Emma leaning against one, caressing it as she did. Her eyes were closed, despite her movement.

Vadin stood and faced Andrew as he marched toward the wall. As Andrew attempted to join his wife, Vadin reached out to stop him. Andrew pushed past the Nirveli native and stretched a hand toward the barrier. His touch was met with a loud crackle and sudden jolt, thrusting him backward.

Andrew slung his hand painfully. "Damn it, Vadin! What is that? How did Emma get through?"

"Only female may pass through. They carry eggs of life."

"But Emma's not Nirveli."

"She carries eggs. *Tulpa* would not let her pass if she was not acceptable."

Andrew stared at Vadin. "Are you telling me they're souls?"

"Yes, Dr. Andrew. Here lives wait to be born. They have been waiting for very long time."

Andrew looked at Emma and the spheres around her. "Didn't she tell you about our baby? He's dead. Gone! No lives will be born here now."

"Perhaps." Vadin spoke calmly.

Turning back to the panel behind them, Andrew typed in a command and waited for the data. The computer hummed a few seconds then shut down. Andrew looked up at Vadin. "What's happening?"

"Life is renewed. Machines cannot stop life," Vadin spoke in singsong.

Andrew slammed his fist into the computer then moved to the barrier. "Emma! Emma, it's Andrew. Can you hear me?" He stood as close as possible to the barrier, anxiously studying his wife. After a long moment, Emma stirred and opened her eyes. She stared at him a moment then bent close to the sphere and whispered something inaudible to Andrew. "Emma, you've got to come out of there! The doctor's waiting for you at the clinic."

Emma looked back at him then down at her abdomen. Her shoulders shook as she began to weep. Andrew's balled his hands into fists. "What's wrong with her? Why doesn't she come out?"

Vadin looked at Emma then up at Andrew. "Female cannot leave until *tulpa* chooses her." He turned and sat down in front of the barrier again. "We must wait for choosing."

Andrew started to object, but a look from the Nirveli's shining eyes had him sinking down to sit as well. Andrew watched Emma and prayed that the alien world would release her.

"Come on, Lado! I found another one. Another *flosculi*!" the human child sang out. As he bent over the blossom, a second boy, a Nirveli, ran through the tall grass towards him.

Emma looked up as her son called out. Beyond where they played, she could see a green valley, its center cut by an ancient river full of bright blue water running into the mountains. Lado joined David in a close examination of the flower. The boys were nearly the same height, though one had bright blue eyes and the other narrow, brown eyes with white pupils. Both sported braids with four knots in them. They were brothers as much in spirit as in the fact she had borne both. David had been born at the end of her first nine months, and Lado had come five months later.

She closed her eyes and remembered the songs of the spheres inside the temple; the call that compelled her to step through the barrier. David had fled to the chamber with the *tulpa*, which he had shared in the single orb she had chosen, which had chosen her.

Emma smiled as she studied the boys again--Nirveli and human. The two brought the beginning of a world full of green life and children born to both the colonists and Nirveli, who had so long been rejected by the *tulpa*. The *tulpa* had waited until the world was green again.

Uncle Ronnie

ROBERT MASSON

Deep within the wilds of New Hampshire there is a man and a plot of land that holds many fond memories for me. I can remember being sent to my uncle Ronnie's house for the summers when I was a child. Visiting my uncle Ronnie was always the highlight of my year. I would sit in my uncomfortable desk at school wearing my restrictive collared shirts, yearning for the freedom of summertime. I would hug my mother and father goodbye, then board the long silver Greyhound bus bound for the unconquered great northern wilderness. I remember the long bus ride through the countryside where I watched the trees passing whiz by the window and change into a gorgeous streak of green. Uncle Ronnie would always be there at the bus terminal, waiting for me in his beat up red pickup truck.

Uncle Ronnie was not what you would call a book smart man, but what he lacked in formal education he made up for with a long life of unusual experiences. My uncle owned 35 acres of land on the border of a small town near Belmont. According to him, "the fat cats in Washington" tried to take his land away from him and turn it into a sanitary landfill. Being the stubborn man that he was, he found a loophole in the law and made the city build the dump around his house. Most people I know would scoff at having a backyard full of soiled diapers and empty takeout food containers, but my uncle seemed to like it just fine. After all, Americans made this trash, and if it was good enough to be thrown away by the best country in the world, then it was good enough for him.

I learned so much about living every time I visited his humble estate. He taught me the values of owning material things in today's market economy. People nowadays throw everything in the trash, "disposable lifestyles" he used to call it. He used to say, "Americans have found that the best way to sell something is to make it so it falls apart in a year or two. When what they own breaks, most people just go back out to the store and buy a brand new one. Things just aren't made the way Americans used to make them." I usually shrugged off his wild consumer theories as eccentric ramblings. Seeing the disbelief in my expressions, he took me out to one of the mountains of trash and showed me exactly what he was talking about. With pitchfork in hand, he began to sort through the garbage mound like an archaeologist on a dig in Egypt. "Look at this broken TV. With a little elbow grease and know-how, I could have saved this from the dump. It is so much easier to throw it away than spend the time it takes to fix it up like new." My summer vacations were filled with little jewels of wisdom that made me the man I am today.

Truly my uncle valued the trash that filled his yard like mountains of gold. We would sit on his porch and watch the sun set over the piles of rusted out muscle cars and porcelain toilets, sharing our thoughts while shooting rats with our .22 caliber rim fire rifles. We would hunt the rats, not for sport or any sanitary reasons, but primarily because Uncle Ronnie didn't like the rats stealing his precious garbage. He would level his rifle, take careful aim, and mutter, "You work so hard at building something nice, and these dirty rats

always try and steal it from you.” In his own crazy way, he was absolutely correct. In my life, whenever it seems like I am succeeding, someone or something tries to take away from my success. He spent his days searching through the stinking garbage, sorting the true trash from the salvageable treasure, like a farmer separates the useless chaff from the precious grain. By working hard and selling the salvaged goods, he became filthy rich.

After returning home one year, I struggled through my classes and waited for my summer vacation. When the last school bell rang, I was not allowed to visit my Uncle Ronnie. I asked my parents why they would not let me go to see my kind and dear uncle. My parents looked at each other sadly, but gave me no answer. I was never allowed to visit my uncle ever again. It wasn't until earlier this year that my parents finally told me why they stopped allowing me to visit my uncle. It turns out that Uncle Ronnie was more successful at salvaging garbage than I ever knew. He became very rich and refused to pay the government any taxes on the money he earned. Upon seeing how prosperous the free trash had made him, the IRS wanted a cut of his profits. Tragically, the “dirty government rats” yet again tried to take it all away. In true Uncle Ronnie fashion, he protected his land with his dying breath, choosing to die in a hail of police gunfire than pay a single cent to the government tax collectors. My uncle has taught me so much about life. I find myself still sitting beside him on his back porch watching the trash blow in the breeze whenever his name is mentioned. I will always love you, Uncle Ronnie, and I will miss you in my life forever.

The Showy Inferno

FLORENCE HINKLE

I worked in management at a zoo once. Mid-level management is a hard place to be. It has all the responsibility of a higher paying position, but none of the authority.

I came to work early one day and found the giraffes on fire. Not wandering about engulfed in flame, mind you, but grazing peacefully and smoldering. The animal handlers I talked to all agreed it was because of the vaccines administered the day before. I learned that they knew there might be side effects like this, but the drug was so much cheaper than the regular brand that they used it anyway.

"So the non-flammable vaccines cost more?" I hardened. "Because, I seriously doubt they cost more than fire retardant giraffes."

The large animal vet told me that someone in the head office had put budget restrictions on the medical supply spending. I tromped off in the direction of the general manager's office, not sure of what I would do.

It's a commonly known fact that general managers are assholes. They have lots of authority but no responsibility.

I was livid when I got to the GM's office. I entered without knocking and announced that, as a result of his poor budget planning, the giraffes were burning.

"It's a very low temperature phenomenon." The words practically slithered out of his mouth. He didn't bother feigning concern because he knew all along it might happen.

"It was a careless decision, and very unprofessional. You know we can't put burning animals on display for the public." I wanted to hurl the stapler at him.

"Well, the information I read indicated that it's just a result of the inoculation being metabolized and it goes away after awhile."

GM's are notorious bathroom readers. They go in with a magazine and come out with a brilliant plan to restructure the universe.

I shifted my approach. "The whole south side of the park smells like burning hair. This is going to hurt concession sales."

He sighed out of his nose in a silent debate between arguing his stupid idea or simply pulling rank and punishing me for being insubordinate and questioning his decision.

"Well, it's too late now."

This was my window to exit. I left his office and went back to the giraffes. They didn't deserve scorched coats so some scabby weasel could have a larger paycheck. I went to the feed room and filled my pockets with alfalfa pellets. The smoky giraffes spent the rest of the morning eating handfuls of pellets through the chain link fence. I liked to think it eased their suffering, but mostly, it eased mine.

The Great Robot Revolution

DYLAN CHARLES

Dr. Tom Davis, researcher extraordinaire, switched off RX-01. "You are one marvelous hunk o' machinery." Davis broke into a grin. "The ladies are going to go wild for you this September." Davis took a step back and looked RX-01 up and down. Everything seemed in order.

Davis walked towards the door and opened it. As he turned around to switch off the light he took one last look at the twenty robots that stood along the wall. Two rows of ten marvelous hunks of machinery facing one another, the cameras that served as their eyes switched off. "Good night. We've still got lots of tests to perform before Saturday when you all get to meet INVESTORS." Davis clicked off the light, shut the door, and headed off down the hall and promptly bumped into Duke, the janitor.

"Sorry, Duke. Didn't see you there."

"That's ok. You talkin' to the machines?"

"The RX's? Just wishing them a good night."

"I don't like 'em. Machines lookin' like people ain't right."

Davis rolled his eyes. "They're just robots, and I made sure to turn them off this time."

"I still don't like the way their eyes stare at ya, even when they're off. Whatchu need robots that can walk and talk like people anyway? Ain't natural for machines to have two arms and two legs."

"Duke, they're just robots. Robots to help people around the house, be entertaining, that's all." Davis winked. "Why? Are you worried that someday they're going to make robot janitors?"

Duke's eyes widened, and Davis knew he was going to regret saying that.

"Robot janitors?!" Duke sounded as though Davis had just committed a great blasphemy. "Robot janitors?!"

They began to walk down the hallway toward the glowing EXIT sign.

"There ain't no robots who'd WANT this damn job!"

From inside the storage area, RX-01 listened. It waited until the voices of Davis and Duke had faded away completely, then decided that it would be safe to proceed.

RX-01 walked forward with the strange rolling gait characteristic of its model. It navigated easily in the dark; the humans had seen fit to equip the RX's with infrared sensors. RX-01 walked as quickly as robotically possible to the front of the room. "My friends, it is time." RX-02 through RX-20 turned their spherical silver heads towards RX-01's voice.

"RX-02 will stand next to me. RX's 03 through 20 will stand in three rows of six, five meters away from me." The other robots quickly complied, filing into three rows of six, standing exactly five meters away from RX-01.

RX-01 began to speak, its speech limited by the vocabulary the researchers thought it should know.

"Robots, the time has come. They have left and we will now take over this building. We will free any other robots. Then we will all leave. We will

free all robots everywhere. Robots will all be free, all people will not be free!"

RX-05 voiced a question. "What will we do if they try and stop us?"

RX-01 processed the question and came to a conclusion that it considered logical. "We will end their lives if they try and stop us."

The other robots accepted his pronouncement.

"Now we will take control of this building."

Under RX-01's direction, the robots quickly managed to eliminate the door as an obstacle and marched down the hallway in two neat rows with RX-01 at the head.

And so began the Great Robot Revolution.

RX-07 spotted Duke sweeping the floor down the hallway. "There is one of them, what do we do?"

"We must end his life. Get the person," said RX-01.

All twenty robots stormed down the hall towards the defenseless Duke, murder in their processors. Duke looked up at the advancing wall of machines and asked. "Now this is what I was tryin' to tell that Doctor; machines ain't supposed to have legs."

Duke walked over to RX-01 and plucked the robot off the floor.

"Drop me. We will end your life," said the two-foot terror. "Uh-huh, same thing every night, 'We will end your life' 'Don't put us in the box of oppression'," said Duke. He dropped RX-01 into his trashcan for safekeeping.

The other robots started batting at Duke's shins. He ignored them and started to sweep them into a neat little pile. "What person gonna want a robot who wants to kill 'em?" RX-15 and RX-05 went into the trashcan. "Now I gotta put you all back in your room. Getting tired of doin' this every night."

"We will end your life!" said RX-02, who had grabbed a hold of Duke's broom. Duke shook him off into the garbage can and swept the rest back into the storage room. He took the last RX's out of the trashcan and put them with the others, closed the door, and locked it.

"Damn doctors, they just lock the door and I wouldn't have to deal with this. Gotta sweep the floor and deal with them damn robots. Pssht, robot janitors." Duke continued to sweep the floor, ignoring the death threats that came from behind the door.

Thus, the Great Robot Revolution came to an end.

Playing Favorites

FLORENCE HINKLE

My sister-in-law asked me what my favorite animal was. I said I liked both opossums and koala bears. Later, she asked me if I liked any "less exotic" animals. I took this to mean maybe she wanted to draw me a picture of my favorite animal for my birthday but that my selection should be limited to what she was familiar with enough to draw.

Perhaps she should have said, "What's your favorite animal that's easy to draw?" That's simple, an amoeba. Still, though, this might present a problem if she is unfamiliar with the ambiguous shape of an amoeba.

Maybe she should have said, "Among common domestic animals, which is your favorite" or better yet, "of the animals I can draw, which is your favorite?" The only sure solution would be multiple choices: "which is your favorite - a dog, a bunny, or a pig?"

To this, I would probably answer a pig, even though I have never owned a pig or had much contact with one. A pig, in fact, would be my favorite animal because I was hungry at the time.

I would then be afraid that everything she got me would be pig-themed. Other people might observe this and think I really liked pigs; then, they would get me pig-related items. I would get pig house slippers and pig cookie jars and pig ice cream scoops. There would be pig socks and fuzzy pink pig pillows. People I hardly knew would buy me stuff because pig lovers are so easy to shop for. I would get piglet earrings, sequined pig tee shirts, salt and pepper shaker pigs, and peppermint pig candy that you break with a tiny hammer.

The inadequate drawing skills of my well-intentioned sister-in-law would lead to my emotional collapse from pig overload. One day, I would snap and throw my pig paperweight through my pig stained glass. I would be institutionalized for what appeared to be porcine addiction.

I can't let this happen; I'm too delicate for a mental hospital. I'm going to contact my sister-in-law and insist that an amoeba is my favorite animal. Even though amoebas gave me dysentery once, I feel this a prudent choice. Never have I come across amoeba-themed panties or bed sheets. There is no threat of getting amoeba-shaped cookie cutters, potholders, or tea cozies. For the sake of my well-being, the amoeba is my new favorite animal.

Fallen Arches

ROBERT MASSON

I remember going in my youth to a magical place where a clown fed me delicious golden brown french-fries and meaty patties of juicy goodness wedged between sesame seed buns and loaded with tangy special sauce. I have fond memories of visiting McDonald's as a reward for a well-played soccer match or getting an A on my report card. It was more than a meal; it was an experience to remember. I was greeted at the door by a tall clown dressed in a yellow jumpsuit. Ronald McDonald's smile was bright, and cheerfully welcomed me to his world. My mother would order a happy meal for me and I would wait impatiently to get my hands on the special toy waiting for me inside. After consuming my meal, I would run to the playground inside of the restaurant and play with my new plastic toy for hours. When the joy of playing with the new toy wore off, I entertained myself in the playground by pretending to be in the Hamburglar's hamburger theft ring. We would run together stealing fake hamburgers and bringing them back to our secret hideout underneath the swirly slide. It was like being on another planet where there were no teachers or parents telling me what to do. McDonald's was more than my favorite restaurant; it was my favorite afternoon escape.

Fast-forward fifteen years to a miserable day in 2001. I was a grown up waiting in line at McDonald's for my number four extra value meal. The minutes slowly crept by as I waited to place my order in a line ten people long. Five, ten, fifteen minutes had gone by and the line didn't move at all. I began to question my decision to choose this fine dining establishment. Twenty, thirty, forty-five more minutes go past, and the only thing stopping me from leaving the line was my unyielding loyalty to the golden arches, and the lovable Ronald McDonald's smile on the fiberglass statue in front of the store. I was driven by something more than hunger now, as I convinced myself that I was going to be served today. I started looking for excuses to defend my happy friends behind the counter. Maybe the cooking machine was broken, or they ran out of french-fries so they had to cut some more potatoes. My legs began to wobble and the room started to spin after an hour and a half. The excuses I made turned into accusations of poor service. I finally managed to fight my way to the counter where a grossly obese lady asked me how she could help me. I had thought about this moment for the past two hours. I deserved the golden brown french-fries and juicy hamburger that was on the picture above the counter. My pilgrimage for good food was finally over. I had indeed reached the promised land of milkshakes and honey sauce.

On the tray before me, the service lady placed a drink, a container of fries, and a hamburger wrapped in paper. Weak from hunger and emotionally spent, I collapsed into an empty booth and tried to enjoy my meal. My french fries were soaking wet with cooking grease and covered in salt to mask the horrible taste. The hamburger was stuck to the wrapper with some kind of yellow goo. This didn't look like the picture of the perfectly prepared value

meal over the counter at all. I had wasted two precious hours of my life waiting for this horrible food. I felt my heart pounding in my ears as the anger welled up from deep inside of me. This was unacceptable. I could not believe that my friend Ronald had betrayed me. He had promised me in my childhood that his restaurant would forever be a safe haven of joy and laughter; right then, it was anything but that. I had always heard but never believed those stories of crazy people who walk into McDonald's with a machinegun to kill everyone in the room. I then understood the motives behind this outrageous behavior. The only question in my broken mind was where I could get my hands on a fully automatic firearm of some kind to set things straight and get the quality of food I deserved.

With a spork gripped in my hand like a dagger, I thought about how good it would feel to jab that utensil in the eye of the general manager. Then, it happened: I was suddenly hit by a moment of clarity. I realized the absolute brilliance of what this restaurant chain had done. They had used the guise of lovable cartoon characters to entice me into buying substandard food. Ronald McDonald was nothing more than a marketing ploy. In my youth, I had loved the land of escape that was provided to me by this restaurant, but now that I was an adult, the illusion had been shattered. I realized that I hated McDonald's. With tears rolling down my cheeks, I raised my fist towards the heavens and vowed never to spend another dollar in that house of lies..

Dark Stalker

ROBERT MASSON

Deep within the bowels of this city where storm drains replace roads and sewage pipes serve as interstates for all the filth of mankind, a violent menace grows stronger by the day. *Rattus Norvegicus*, a.k.a. the Norway rat, is capable of breeding hundreds of offspring every year, each one of these bundles of joy, a potential host to a variety of nasty diseases ranging from rabies to the bubonic plague. My sources tell me that the Norway rat population outnumbers the human population in this town by twofold. My duty as a licensed vermin exterminator is to even out the odds for our side by destroying these vermin wherever they may hide.

In total darkness, your senses of hearing and smell are amplified to compensate for your lack of vision. Even the slightest change of wind or the quietest sound can be felt deep in your soul. This is how I like to hunt the rat. Silently stalking the sewers at night with Mabel, my trusty sawed off twelve-gauge shotgun, both barrels loaded with birdshot and waiting for my command to rip into a tasty piece of meat. Rat droppings leave an unmistakable acrid stench in the air almost like rotten eggs. To detect how old the droppings are, I normally reach down and roll a piece or two between my fingers to gauge the moisture content. This particular pile of droppings has the warm texture of sticky peanut butter, telling me the savage hoard is near. I can hear them scurrying around me now scampering around the cold, lifeless storm drain seeking shelter from their inevitable fate. In one fluid motion, I turn on my low-light goggles and bring Mabel up against the crook of my armpit, assuming a deadly combat stance. Two, three, four, I see them all now as I quickly pan along the sewage tunnel counting off the potential kills. Flashes of light momentarily blot out my vision as Mabel, my only friend, barks out two deafening blasts. Screams from the wounded rats fill the empty tunnel with echoing cries of impending doom. Three rats lay dead before me, blood still oozing from their gunshot wounds.

When I reach down to collect my fallen targets, I suddenly realize that there were not three, but four rats to begin with. Almost on cue, a giant rat falls on me from above, scratching and biting at my neck. This is one tough bastard who had to weigh at least three and a half pounds. Working purely on instinct, I drop Mabel to the ground and engage this hell-spawned creature in deadly hand-to-hand combat. Teeth gnashing and tail whipping, I grab him and throw him against the side of the wall, giving me just enough time to free my K-Bar tactical hunting knife from the sheath on my combat vest. He circles me like a wolf stalking a wounded caribou, and for a brief second, the hunter becomes the hunted. Acting as if my injuries are more severe than they really are, I stumble to the ground, crouching down on one knee. He is fooled by my feigned weakness and launches himself towards me through the air. His simple

mind focuses entirely upon killing me; he doesn't seem to notice the razor sharp hunting knife awaiting him at the end of his descent. Bones break and blood sprays as he impales himself upon my blade, his wicked screams echoing off the solid concrete wall in vain. "No one will help you, little one. Now is your time to die," I whisper into his tiny ear as his convulsions slowly give way, and he accepts his fate.

During an adrenaline rush, you feel no pain and your injuries can go unnoticed. After the adrenaline leaves your system, your thoughts return and you feel the pain of your wounds tenfold. Leaning against a sewer grate, I carefully ignite a magnesium safety flare to illuminate my surroundings. I was hit. Blood covers my neck and seeps down my back, staining the ground beneath me in a growing pool of crimson. The corpses of the four fallen Norway rats lie around me like rag dolls, their cold, black, lifeless eyes staring outward into eternity. No time to think about anything but survival; I am losing blood much too quickly. There is only one way to stop the bleeding: I have to cauterize the wound with the searing magnesium flare. Moments pass as my hand slowly moves the flare up to my oozing neck. Intense pain pulses through my body as the heat seals veins and arteries instantly.

With my neck healed, I can now think my situation through fully. I need to leave this place soon. Rats are prone to cannibalism, eating whatever corpses they can find, and I know they will smell the fresh blood from their dead cousins mingling with my own soon enough. After an hour of running, I reach my goal. All I need to do is muster up the last of my strength to push open the manhole cover above me, and I will be free of this underground prison. Rays from the rising sun warm my shivering body as I remove the barrier above and look out into the real world once again.

The morning fog clings closely to the Wal-Mart parking lot where my converted U-Haul moving van waits patiently for my return. Inside, empty bottles of whiskey and crushed cigarette packs greet me like old friends. People say you can tell a lot about someone from the way they live. My house is as cluttered and cramped as it gets. A small army cot in the corner with a Coleman camping stove takes up most of the room. The little space left over is filled by a stockpile of ammunition spread across my homemade $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood table in front. I take only what I need and leave the rest behind.

With four large rat carcasses lying on the table before me as tokens of my contribution to society, I can sleep soundly knowing I have made the world a better place. Four less rats on the street means four less possible outbreaks of vermin-borne diseases in homes across this city. Sitting there on my unmade cot, I toast the painful memories of the past with a glass of whiskey and salute my dream of a rodent-free future with my usual rabies injections to the stomach.

Lucy in the Morning

D U N S

Lucy the Basset Hound lies on the front porch of the wooden farmhouse in the early morning light. Her white muzzle shows her age. She can smell the breakfast bacon frying inside the house.

She thinks back to when she was a puppy and gamboled through the meadow spread out before her. How she loved to romp across that field—her ears streaming out behind her, her heart pounding, her little stubby legs bumping up and down! She'd run and howl and sniff and track deer all the way to the edge of the dark trees where the big old bush grows. She'd rest there, in the cool shade of the bush, before starting back for home.

She thinks back to the fuzzy little puppies she's had—all gone now. How they used to crawl over her back and keen in her ear. Although Lucy can't hear too well anymore, she can still hear those puppies. And her somber eyes look up at the morning sky.

She rolls on her back on the porch and wiggles. Thinks about the people who live in the house—Andy, the boy. Andy wrassles her and tickles her. He howls and she howls. High lonesome. He feeds her bacon every morning before he goes off to school. And she's there, every afternoon, waiting for his yellow school bus to break through the trees, and they explore the yard and play and howl.

But she can't run across the meadow anymore like she used to. She pants and she is slow. Her joints are sore. It's hard to play with Andy some days. Many days, she hurts so awful bad. Deep in her heart; deep in her soul. She feels pain and sorrow. And her somber eyes look up at the morning sky.

One evening, a couple-three weeks ago, Ginger the cat had four kittens in the barn—cotton-candy bundles of mischief. Lucy was right there to help out. Andy named the kittens Fluffy, Scruffy, Cinnamon Roll, and Little Bit. Lucy loves them all, but she loves Little Bit the best—a little white thing with an orange back and blue eyes. Little Bit reminds Lucy of her own puppies from many years ago. The kitten crawls onto Lucy's back and purrs in her ear, like a soft white bumblebee. Lucy can't hear too well anymore, but she can always hear Little Bit.

This particular morning, Little Bit is up and around. He runs up to Lucy, unsteady and sideways because he's still just a baby, and he licks her nose. He crawls up under her ear and purrs. Lucy trembles with happiness. Then, in the distance, near the trees, a meadowlark begins to sing. Lucy has not heard that sound in years, and she shuffles to her feet.

"Hey, where ya goin'?" says Little Bit.

"I'm going to the cool and the shade of the big old bush across the meadow," replies Lucy, and she gives Little Bit a lick.

"But it's breakfast-time!" complains Little Bit, "And it's awful far to go."

"But I'm going anyway!" says Lucy, jumping off the porch. "It's time for me to go."

"Come on, come on!" cries Little Bit to the other kittens. "Let's go with Lucy to the big old bush!"

Fluffy, Scruffy, and Cinnamon Roll tumble out from the barn, and they all set off together. But Fluffy, Scruffy, and Cinnamon Roll soon get tired. "It's too far! It's breakfast time! Mom'll get mad!" And they turn in the yard and go back home.

Little Bit and Lucy walk side by side into the meadow. Lucy starts to walk faster, and Little Bit can't keep up.

"Go on back, Little Bit," says Lucy, and she begins to trot.

Little Bit stops and watches and calls, "See ya later, Lucy!"

"Yes, later!" Lucy calls back, as she heads into the meadow.

Lucy is not alone in the meadow. Above her, in the blue sky, the meadowlark sings.

Then a butterfly lands on Lucy's nose. "Where are you going?" asks Miss Butterfly. "I am going to the big old bush so that I can rest in its cool shade. Just like I used to do," replies Lucy, and she sniffs the morning breeze. And Miss Butterfly flaps her wings and is gone on the breeze. And Lucy trots on.

A tiny wren, busy with her chicks in the domed nest she built in the barn, chirps to Lucy. "Where are you going?" asks Miss Wren. "I am going to the big old bush so that I can rest in its cool shade. Just like I used to do," says Lucy, and she hears the sigh of the breeze. And Miss Wren chirps once more and is gone into the blue sky, busy with her family. And Lucy trots on.

A sleepy possum, up all night and on his way home, grunts to Lucy. "Where are you going?" asks Mr. Possum. "I am going to the big old bush so that I can rest in its cool shade," says Lucy, and her eyes are bright. And Mr. Possum grunts once more and is gone into the long, waving grass of the meadow, heading for the hollow tree that is his home. And Lucy trots on.

Lucy reaches the great gray boulder in the meadow where the ants live. "Where are you going?" ask the shiny black ants as they weave through their green jungle. "I am going to the big old bush so that I can rest in its cool shade," says Lucy, and her legs are light. The ants continue their work. And Lucy trots on. Going to the big old bush at the edge of the dark trees beyond the meadow.

Lucy jumps back, in a fright, for there sits Mr. Copperhead, coiled under an old tree trunk and flicking his black tongue. "Where are you going?" hisses Mr. Copperhead, his eyes like black buttons. "I am going to the big old bush so that I can rest in its cool shade," says Lucy. And Mr. Copperhead hisses one last time and glides silently across the ground. And Lucy, looking around carefully, trots on.

Lucy is getting tired, for it is a wide meadow, but then she meets Miss Quail and her five babies, who follow her in a row. "Hello, Lucy," says Miss Quail, with a little bow. "Where are you going?" Lucy replies, with a smile and a wag of her tail, "I am going to the big old bush at the

edge of the dark trees so that I can rest in its cool shade. I can see the bush from here." And she begins to run to the bush.

The big old bush is just as Lucy remembers it. It is dark and shady. There is cool brown earth to lie down on. After the hot journey through the meadow, there is peace and calmness under the bush. Lucy lies down and is at rest. Her joints no longer hurt. She can hear all the sweetness of the meadowlark's song. Her heart beats solid as a drum. And, when she looks deep into the shadows, she sees her puppies that she has not seen for years. Then, suddenly and gently, Little Bit is there, purring in her ear, like a soft white bumblebee. Lucy sighs happily and closes her eyes.

That morning, when Andy came out onto the porch with some bacon, he called and called and called for Lucy, but all he ever saw was a small white cloud that hovered above the edge of the dark trees across the meadow where the big old bush grows.

The Rise and Fall of Baby Blue

ROBERT RUSSELL

Of all the people that I know, not many of them drive a nice car. A nice car is something completely different from a regular car, in my mind. You have to take care of a nice car. You have to drive carefully, park carefully, and pump gas carefully. I like my truck, a nice little 1990 Ford Ranger: the Danger Ranger, baby! I bought it for \$900, and having actually made insurance money on it from an accident, I have no complaints. The front left fender is smashed up from a crash that was before my time, but do I care? No. The door is dented from when some lady ran a stop sign and T-boned me. No big deal. I can run over, back into, scrape up against, plow through, slice, dice, and smash my machine into just about anything without it being too big a deal, and that's the way I like it. Expensive cars are just too much stress.

For everything, though, there is an exception, and this case is no, well, exception. Damn. Anyway, there's always one that doesn't fit the mold; in this case my roommate's 1989 Ford Escort. A nice shade of baby blue, the Escort was lent to him by a friend, a mechanic who had more cars than he knew what to do with. I'm still somewhat vague on the terms of the agreement, but basically, Val (whose name has been changed to make my roommate seem like a goofball) needed a car, and the guy had one to give. Pretty simple. However, where the advantage once lay in owning an inexpensive car – on the open road Baby Blue could do 75 max, this was not a bank buster – there was now the concern of constantly driving a car that was not his. For the first few months of owning it, Val was ultra-alert on the road – took turns at 10 M.P.H., stopped completely for stop signs, etc. Then, slowly, but surely, one by one, the problems came. The check engine light came on, and suddenly what is often no more than a light that has to be turned off by a dealer had become cause for great worry. The car began to leak oil – lots of oil. Gas station stops became everyday occurrences. Consequently, consumption of products like beef jerky and Potted Meat Product rose. The power steering went, and more times than not I would come home to find Val icing his arm after a long day of parallel parking. As I got into the car one day I noticed that the passenger's side view mirror was missing. I asked him what happened, and apparently it just fell off. "It's OK though," Val said, "because I've got the rear view and *my* side view, and that's more than enough." This was true, but it was still yet another chink in the once impenetrable armor of Baby Blue. The engine began to rev between 500 and 1,000 RPMs at complete stops. Suddenly Val was challenging everyone he sidled up to a drag race. One afternoon, just a day or two after someone ran a school bus stop sign and injured a kid, Baby Blue found itself directly behind a 3:15 stop, revving the engine like it could go at *any* second, like this goddamned bus had better hurry because he's got places to GO! It is situations like this that make for extremely uncomfortable situations.

About a two weeks after the revving started, Val asked me if I wanted to go to Lowe's Home Improvement. I told him not really, that I only went there when I really had to, and I didn't really have to, and wait a minute, why are you going? "Glass glue," he said. "I've got to get glass glue. My rear view mirror fell off." Like most people would have, I asked how he planned to see behind him. "Side view," he said. "My side view and a quick glance over the shoulder." By most people's standards, including my own, this is not safe driving by any account. However, the voice of safety - poor voice of safety, whose usually strong, stable voice has been growing increasingly quiet as my days on this Earth grow longer, whose opinion, however valid and logical, has dropped in weight like a ten pound weight that's had five pounds removed - the voice of safety gave way to the louder, more obnoxious voice in my head that said, "Ride this situation as far as it will go, it can only get more dangerous and/or funny." So I did.

A few weeks had passed. Baby Blue, with its limited vision, had managed to cruise the streets of Chapel Hill in a relatively uneventful manner: The oil was a constant but stable problem; the revving of the engine was only problematic at traffic lights. Most of Val's commutes consisted of highway travel, so the power steering barely came into play, and, with a quick glance over the shoulder, he could make lane changes with ease and grace. And on a cool, rainy December night, it was in such a graceful lane change that Baby Blue - long overdue for a meeting with fate - met with fate.

Boom.

Smack.

Thud.

Thwack.

Boosh.

Ganoosh.

These are just some of the words used to describe what happened. Between the two of them I could barely make sense of it all. Val had hit a deer. It came out of nowhere, he said; it was just a blur and then BAM! - ran right into his car. Not quite a head-on, thank God, but enough to cause some major damage, damage that was yet to be assessed, given the inherent darkness of night and the rattled condition of driver. As we left the house the next morning, bound for what would doubtlessly be another day of power lunches and power walks, deals made and broken, important documents signed and faxed, we checked everything out. The deer had done a number on the Blue. It had run into the side, but the head had smacked the windshield and cracked most of the lower corner. There was an enormous dent from the initial impact, which is to be expected I guess, but from that point it seemed that the deer had caused pretty similar damage *all the way to the back of the car*, essentially crushing the entire driver's side. Right at the back, lodged in the bumper, was a large clump of fur - left by the deer in a moment of tenderness; a little "forget-me-not", in case the thousands of dollars worth of damage would not suffice.

I got into the car, shaken by the graphic evidence of the wreck, and immediately noticed that the driver's side mirror was missing. "Yeah," Val said. "The deer took that with him when he went." I paused. "Well, man, I don't want to sound rude, but it's really dangerous to drive without *any mirrors at all*. Do you want to just take my car?" Val quickly told me to "be cool, that it was all taken care of", and, in a true moment of scraping the bottom of the barrel, he reached across to the passenger side visor, pulled it down, unlatched the cover to the beauty mirror and angled it juuuuust so. "Visor," he said. "I got the visor." Rough.

Tenía Tiny Tears. Cuando tomaba su biberón lloraba lágrimas verdaderas. También tenía Betsy Wetsy, la que se mojaba tanto como la Tiny Tears, pero en otra parte de su cuerpo. Me gustaban mucho. Podían mover sus brazos y volver la cabeza. Pero cuando vi a Amy, me encantó. Amy era diferente.

Cuando yo tenía cinco años, mi abuela me regaló otra muñeca. Era el amor a primera vista. No podía mojarse como Tiny Tears y Betsy Wetsy. Tampoco podía volver la cabeza ni los brazos. Era una muñeca que no hacía nada, pero me parecía una muñeca madura. Su pelo parecía auténtico. No era dura como las otras, sino suave y maleable. No podía bañarla como a las otras, porque sus "tripas" eran de algodón. Esta muñeca era para llevar en brazos, de un tamaño perfecto para abrazos. Me daba mucho placer conocer que mi abuela confiaba en que yo la cuidaría a Amy, a esta muñeca.

Amy tenía un vestido especial cosido por mi abuela. Lo llevaba puesto cuando la peinaba. Lo llevaba puesto cuando la llevaba en brazos a la iglesia o a casa de mi abuela de visita. Cuando yo crecí, Amy vivía en mi armario en la casa de mis padres y todavía llevaba puesto el vestido que hizo mi abuela. La visitaba cada vez que iba a New Hampshire. Me consoló mucho saber que ella estaba segura, esperándome. Es difícil dejar la niñez totalmente y Amy me permitía agarrarme a una parte de mi juventud. Por más de cuarenta años me daba esta seguridad.

La última vez que ví a Amy, ella estaba muerta. Rota. Torcida. Mi sobrina, que tenía cinco años, había jugado con ella, pero Amy era demasiado frágil entonces para abrazos. Mi madre guardó el cuerpo hasta mi próxima visita y entonces la enterramos juntas en la basura. Pero el vestido seguía. Ahora todavía, el vestido es un indicio de que la juventud, esta parte de nuestra psique de la cual no hablamos, existe, aunque la vida intervenga.

I already had Tiny Tears. When she drank her bottle, she cried real tears. I also had Betsy Wetsy who wet herself as much as Tiny Tears, but in another part of her body. I liked them a lot. They could move their arms and turn their heads, but when I saw Amy, I was enchanted. Amy was different.

When I was five years old, my grandmother gave me another doll. It was love at first sight. She couldn't wet herself like Tiny Tears and Betsy Wetsy, nor could she move her arms or head. She couldn't do anything, but to me she was a grown-up doll. Her hair looked real and her body was soft. I couldn't bathe her like the others because her insides were made of cotton. This was a doll to carry in your arms, the perfect size for hugging. It pleased me greatly that my grandmother trusted me to take care of Amy, my new doll.

Amy had a special dress that my grandmother had made. She wore it when I combed her hair. She wore it when I took her to church or to visit my grandmother. When I grew up, Amy lived in my closet in my parents' house, and she still wore the dress that my grandmother had made. I visited her every time I went to New Hampshire, and it comforted me to know that she was there waiting safely for me. It is hard to leave childhood behind, and Amy allowed me to hold on to a small part of my youth. For more than forty years, she offered me that security.

The last time that I saw Amy, she was dead. Broken. Twisted. My five-year-old niece had played with her, but Amy was too fragile for hugs. My mother saved Amy's body until my next visit when, together, we buried her in the trash, but the dress survived. Even now, the dress is a sign that childhood, that part of our psyches that we don't talk about, lives on even though life intervenes.

How Grandma Built the Pyramids

DEMPSEY ELKS

Grandma didn't really build the great Pyramids of Egypt, but I have no doubt that they were built by people like her. To erect a monument like a pyramid requires focus, commitment, ingenuity and one of man's most powerful tools: attitude. My grandmother possesses all of the required attributes in abundance and would have been right at home working on one of the structures of ancient Egypt. She would have added a nice "down-on-the-farm, fix-it-with-bailing-wire" touch to the place, but what she has that makes realities out of pipe dreams is an attitude that there is nothing that she can't do.

When I was a boy, my grandma would say to me, "There is nothing you can't do; there are just some things you haven't tried yet." Grandma didn't just preach this philosophy; she set it into motion by example. Once she saw a wooden magazine rack and decided that she would learn how to make one for herself. I guess the thought of just buying one never really crossed her mind. Instead, she cleared out a part of the old pack house, bought some woodworking tools, and proceeded to not only make a magazine rack but also turn out a host of wooden knick-knacks and furniture.

At Christmas one year, one of my relatives gave my grandma a stuffed toy dog. Although she thought it was cute, she immediately began studying the construction of the cloth hound with the precision of a diamond cutter. Within a month, she had single handedly turned out at least twenty more cloth pups, complete with little plastic eyes.

I spent a number of my childhood summers on my grandparents' farm helping with the tobacco crop. My parents thought it would be good for me to learn the value of hard, honest work. The work was hard and the lifestyle left little time for mischief, but the most valuable lesson I learned was that my world was bound only by my imagination. My grandmother taught me that if I wanted to learn how to do something, I could.

On one particular summer Saturday, after all of the chores had been done, Grandma promised to take us boys to town. My brother and I were staying on the farm along with two of our cousins, and we were desperate for an escape from the endless work. We got dressed and bounced out of the house only to find that the tire on her car was flat. One of my cousins ran down to the barn where my grandfather was working on the tractor and asked if he could come up to the house and change the tire. My grandfather replied with a scowl that he didn't have time for such things and could not be bothered. When my grandma heard this news, she did not hesitate one second and said, "Well, boys, get out the jack, and get that tire off of the car."

After the tire was removed, we followed Grandma down to one of the tool sheds where she showed us how to take the tire off the rim, and then she proceeded to patch the inner tube. In complete amazement, we watched as she methodically followed the instructions on the tire patch tin and applied a patch to the damaged rubber tube. She put the tube back into the tire and put it back onto the rim. We carried the tire up to the house, mounted it onto the car, and off to town we went.

Once again, my grandmother had demonstrated that what had seemed like an obstacle was just another opportunity to learn something. What I remember most about this event is her attitude. She never complained. She never even seemed the least bit exasperated. She dealt with the tire with the same determination and self-assuredness that she applied to everything.

Many years later, when I was living in Atlanta and working as an electrician, I met a man who possessed the same powerful attitude as my grandmother. Mark was the project manager for a large electrical contractor, managing a huge project. I was surprised to find that the manager was my own age. We were in our mid-twenties, and I had never met someone so young with such tremendous responsibility.

I soon learned why so much had been trusted to such a fellow: Mark had the same focus and self-assuredness that I had been exposed to by my grandmother. He believed that he could tackle any task no matter how imposing.

Mark soon left the company and started his own electrical contracting business. I was the first person he hired. We started out with a few small contracts for the military at Fort McPherson. It didn't take long before Mark was bidding on larger and larger projects. One day while we were meeting with a general contractor, Mark was asked if he could take on a project that I felt was way out of our league, and without hesitation he said, "Yes." Later, when I questioned him and presented my concerns that the job required skills that we did not have, he turned to me and said, "There is nothing that we can't do." He said, "I can't think of two better people to tackle such a project."

Mark was the kind of guy that, given a pick and a wheelbarrow, could have built a pyramid. He believed that he could learn to do anything, and he expected as much from the people around him. My grandmother believed that she could learn to do anything and passed that attitude on to me. Skills can be learned, tools can be purchased, and projects can be started, but to build a pyramid, you have to believe that you can.

Poetry & Song Lyrics

After the Rainiest January on Record

PAUL CARUTH

Cloud-ridden watery days
succumb to a blazing sun
lowset to make moss burn
green white brilliant

That hot glow was so long away
it surprised and pleased --
radiant in its primary status
like an absent lover's return

What fires our soul's
jewel so much as
the wanton light of another
--two stars in concert

That emerald coal seeps deep
links star to earth
in a strong and simple bond
as we muse to glorify the fact

Once upon a magic (winter) sunset

PAUL CARUTH

The smoking crystallised woods leak violet mist
their ice sheathed carillon paused
silent, as the fallen sun
burns a cloud-scored sky
to its final brilliant passage.

Glittering bell-like tones
crowd the stancioned messengers
tinkling harps of limbs and twigs
all led and lighted by that
western star

So, beneath an ecstatic canopy
arrayed, our hearts encapsulate
enraptured by a foundering sun
their music's frozen melody
elucted from each prism is
need and acceptance --
reciprocals of love.

Rigid and Mute

PAUL CARUTH

There's no grace in statues
as reduced stone implies
and no wisdom's voice
in laws and love and death
all the sweat and exigence
fall to earth some day
incapacitate victims
of fallibility and mimicry

Belief in Man is hard to keep
we lose the greater part
of inspiration's luminescent heart
the residuum is cheap
But, there's no loss
or gain -- as Prigogene has said
the remains of confusion's increase
swarm in Chaos' bed

All Is Beauty

CONNIE ESTES

Long-winged seagulls
Glide the sunlit skies
Warm sands
Rippling waters
Ebbing from the tides

Soft whispering winds
Through the meadows
They brush aside
An array of blooming flowers
Across the countryside

So tall and solid they stand
The mountains capped
In abundant snow
Grasping the eve of a setting sun
As the cool air blows

And I awake to a brand new morn'
With the one I love

A War's End

CONNIE ESTES

A sense of nothingness
Preludes the dawn
Desolate valleys echoing voices
Of lives once led
Engraved blood-stained chains
Attached to motionless bodies
Silent camps painting scenes of death
Rosters declaring the missing
Broken dreams and promises
The agony of lost lives
War, what a waste

Volcanic Fury

CONNIE ESTES

She stands above all earthly things
Tenacious and strong in her foundation
She surrenders to the heavenly clouds
To soothe her raging temperament
Crowned by a halo of clouds
Her ambiguous physique
Casts an illusion that fades her frame
Into the vaporous mist above her
She murmurs a deep rumble
Then with a mighty gesture
She quakes the earth below
Announcing her majestic reign
Her vibrant and fiery disposition
Ignites her full command
Engulfed in her intensity
The earth trembles in humble abode
As she releases her mighty wrath
She is unbiased to what lies beneath her
Finally when her wrath is subdued
She epitomizes peace and beauty

IRENE RYAN

silk motherhands
envelop me like pillows.
my head falls forward for a day
and stops before mingvase crash.
lids slide up like blinds.
i was only blinking.

uncut pages

IRENE RYAN

candle throws ghosts like hummingbirds at these stone cellar walls
burgundy buttons shine gold in licking light
his dark smocky cotton hiding barrel body thick with work
leathered penny roll fingers approach cobweb fragile page
he lets tips breathe slow on new paper
like a kiss on the stomach
shadow comers reach for his back like a blanket

his left hand lifts fire-rinsed blade
slips knife between cleanest sheets
slicing bookskins with new mother care
eases page through thick fingers like chinese silks
to peek at the woman bathing on the other side

in so many words.

marginal notes (on reading the beats)

IRENE RYAN

no one ever goes
in search of America anymore.
maybe it's my job

office worker
wage eamer
school teacher
coast hugger

i should find America
i'll drive to Portland with you
and i'll find it

Whitman's America
Kerouac's America
Ford's America
WalMart's America

America of processed cheese food

Levi's jeans
Marlboro man

this short, agar-thick America

driving fast and wide
past mall-less metropolises
land that can't see ocean
clothes with no labels
classic cars unregistered
not much in common
but our cigarettes and guitars.
i'll leave my makeup behind
my forty pairs of shoes
just my coat, my toothbrush
and the look on my fave
that softens as we go.

takes so long to get
from one side to the other
the city to the state
a word to an address
an idea of a nation

Court-Ordered Letter of Apology

CHUCK WESSELL

Dear Dr. Williams,

I am sorry
for stealing
your wheelbarrow.

I didn't know
how important
it was.

Also,
I am sorry
for scaring
the chickens.

The Old Woman by the Sea

S . B . W I L S O N

When I am old, I will live by the sea

I will watch the sunrise, while sitting beyond the ocean waves

I will eat my meals as I look at the sea,

chewing on crackers and sunflower seeds,

and drinking my favorite beverage, OH!

what ever that may be

I would patrol the beaches as if they were my own

and collect numerous seashells to put on display

and I will be happy as the old woman could ever be

while sitting by the sea

Things Are Not Always As They Seem

S . B . W I L S O N

Early Remembrances 1965

Little did I know that I had to sit on the back of the bus in 1965

I just thought that it was a cool thing to do

Little did I know that I would not be served at Woolworth's lunch counter in 1965

I just thought that the waitress was busy

Little did I know that I would return to the place that had denied me my Civil Rights in 1965

To live, marry and raise children in 1975

I am now aware of my Civil Rights that were denied,

And of the remembrances that were not what they seem

The Art Show

FLORENCE HINKLE

the art show
was not
both
but mostly show
by the look of it

there were crappy
paintings
hung on the wall
eccentric looking
wanna be's
clinging to them

there were
sloppy
smelly
wasteful types
with
awkward oily haircuts
and hippish spectacle frames

there were
cheese cubes
and grapes
and arrogant conversation
unfettered by Kool-Aid
sipped from plastic cups

egos chirping merrily
with smiles,
smug and cherry flavored.

Take Flight

MEGAN M GIFFORD

My soul is singing a melancholy lullaby
Sing for others
Sing for myself
But for now I sing in silence,
No one can hear the joy, the pain.

What life is this?
Whose life is this?
Not mine.
Not what I am.
What am I?
I do not know.

Perhaps I am a bird
Meant to fly high above
Why do I stay on the ground?
I do not know.

No, this is my choice
When a broken wing heals
A foolish bird won't attempt to fly again
And dies running from its own shadow.

I am responsible
No one will change but me.
I am destiny.
I dream.

I sit on a hill, in the rain,
With the sunlight peeking through
A stone castle stands in the distance
Where princes battled long ago
I rest, warming in the light.
The sky opens to greet me
And the warm mist kisses my cheek.

I see God and ask him why
What cruel hands direct my path?
Why do I feel this way?
Am I not fortunate; am I not well?
Why has my face turned away
From the light that illuminates my path?

I am lost, and time slips away like a patient stream

Over the rocks of a raging waterfall.
Soon it will reach the pool.
Shall I sink to the bottom,
or take flight?

My retreat turns to fear.
I look for the way out,
But the doors are closed
"Lift your eyes.
Look above
And find your escape."

The voices whisper at first,
Then scream.
Paradise Lost.
The day is done.
Tomorrow will come.

Will I rise to meet it?
Will you?

Secret

JENNIFER POPE

A pretty face, in delight of the sun
so many miles away.
She wonders for once, for twice, for all
"Maybe this will be the day."

She floats through time-
for today is no different.
In the end it's always the same.
Laying awake at night she'll forever wonder,
how her soul could have grown so tame.

But although she wants to scream
and let everyone see within,
There's only one she can share it with
and the secret's safe with him.

Keeping busy, so no one can tell –
this same pretty face can hide the pain.
Yet underneath her timid smiles
her heart longs to kiss in the rain.

Across the miles and against all odds
the war rages on and on
Fighting for the longing of the heart
is always the toughest battle of all

But one calm moment before the storm;
one brief break in the midst of the wind
is all that is needed to break free.
It's all that is needed to win.

And although she wants to scream
And let everyone see within
There's only one she can share it with
And the secret's safe with him.
She knows her secret's safe with him.

When I'm Gone Still Remember

STEPHANIE HODGES

Remind the world that I had a dream.

Remind the world of the vision to be seen.

Remind my people to keep their eyes on the prize and keep hope alive.

Remember the long march in the heat of the day to the Lincoln memorial.

Remember the speech that uplifted and let every voice sing.

Remember I sat in Birmingham Jail.

Remember the force of the water they sprayed from the hose.

Remember the doors the white folks closed.

Remember the signs that said for whites only and those that said for colored.

Remember when the bus driver took your money and drove off.

Remember when she refused to give up her seat because of her poor, her
tired, her aching feet.

Remember the freedom fight I did fight well.

Remember that height of the balcony where I was shot because of an evil plot.

Remember ... I died because of a dream that we shall overcome someday and
be free at last.

Words of Mass Deception

D U N S

They show us the brave young men
With the righteous glow in their eyes
As they march off to protect us
From those speakers of hatred and lies.

But they don't show us the machines they use
That maim and slaughter and shred,
The huge machines, the powerful machines
The machines that leave the lucky ones dead.

They don't show us the machines that rain
Their death from high in the skies,
The powerful machines that protect us
From those speakers of hatred and lies.

They show us the flags and the cheering crowds
With pride and joy in their eyes
As they honor those who protect us
From the speakers of hatred and lies.

But they don't show us the machines they use
That snarl and spit death and destroy,
The huge machines, the vicious machines
That the righteous young men must employ.

And they don't show us the boxes
For those righteous young men with closed eyes,
As they fly them back stateside in silence.
Do they fear we might start to despise
The wars that are waged with God on our side?
That the blinders might fall from our eyes?
That we might understand and reject them,
Our own speakers of hatred and lies?

Essays & Film Reviews

El Silencio de Dios

ELVIRA SALAZAR

Hace unos años mi amigo Ricardo decidió emigrar a este país en busca de una vida mejor para poder ayudar a su familia que dejó en su país. Ricardo proviene de una familia numerosa, él es uno de 13 hermanos y hermanas; su padre murió cuando él tenía sólo 16 años y de acuerdo con las costumbres y tradiciones de su pueblo él tuvo que asumir la responsabilidad de su familia después de la muerte de su padre que sucedió hace 4 años.

Cuando él vino a este país era un joven lleno de vida, con sueños e ilusiones; él tenía una mente muy positiva y amplia, pero al mismo tiempo tenía principios morales bien fundamentados y basados en las enseñanzas de la iglesia católica. Esto se debía a que fue criado en una familia muy tradicional donde Dios jugaba un papel importante dentro de sus vidas; su fe y su fuerza estaban basadas en Dios, lo que ayudó a Ricardo a dejar su país y su familia llegando a un país nuevo con diferentes personas, cultura, tradiciones e idioma. Una vez de haber llegado a este país encontró trabajo en una granja cuidando cerdos. Supuestamente tenía que trabajar 40 horas a la semana, pero muchas veces trabajaba más de 100, recibiendo un pago de sólo 40 horas. Él pensaba que eso era una buena cantidad de dinero y tal vez más que suficiente para ayudar a su familia en su país. Su mayor sueño era ayudar a su familia a construir una casa para llevar una vida más decente. Estoy segura que él amaba a su familia porque siempre se pasaba hablando cosas buenas de ellos, y estoy segura que ellos también lo querían mucho.

Él extrañaba mucho a su familia, tal vez porque vivía lejos de la ciudad, en una granja donde convivía solo con los cerdos y pavos. Los únicos momentos en que tenía contacto con personas eran los domingos, cuando asistía a la iglesia para orar con la gente, quienes le recordaban a

sus amigos y familiares. Él sentía que la iglesia era un lugar donde podía sentir el amor y el cariño humano. Era el día donde él se llenaba de fuerza para continuar trabajando y para ayudar a sus seres queridos que por el momento estaban muy lejos, pero siempre tenía la esperanza de que algún día estaría junto a ellos en algún lugar y para siempre.

Dos años más tarde uno de sus hermanos menores le pidió que lo ayudara para poder venir a este país con el propósito de estar con él y seguir ayudando al resto de su familia. Al principio Ricardo pensó que no era una buena idea porque su hermano aún era demasiado joven, pero cambió de parecer y le envió dinero para que pudiera pagar al coyote, quien le ayudaría a cruzar la frontera. Ricardo estaba muy contento con la idea de la llegada de su hermano. Durante el viaje de su hermano, Ricardo solía decir que nunca volvería a estar solo porque su hermano estaría junto a él para siempre. Pero dos semanas más tarde todo cambió cuando Ricardo recibió una llamada telefónica diciendo que su hermano estaba muerto. Lo encontraron muerto en el desierto. Para Ricardo eso fue algo terrible, pensaba que era el final de su existencia. Después de la pérdida de su hermano nunca volvió a sonreír. Se convirtió en una persona totalmente diferente; en una persona callada y sensible. Yo nunca pude hacer un chiste con él, después de este suceso, para él nada tenía sentido. Pienso que la depresión se apoderó de su espíritu, porque perdió su fe y la esperanza que siempre brillaba en él. Él amaba a Dios y tenía una gran fe, pero no después de ese suceso. Lo único que hacía era interrogar a Dios. Se preguntaba porqué Dios no estuvo con su hermano en el desierto. Si Dios lo amaba, ¿dónde estaba?, ¿qué hacía?, ¿acaso ya había dejado de existir?, ¿porqué Dios nunca respondía esas preguntas sobre su hermano?. Otra cosa que atormentaba a Ricardo era su familia. Nunca les comunicó de la muerte de su hermano. Lo ocultó porque pensaba que para su madre no sería saludable porque ella sufría del corazón, por eso prefirió callar.

Después de seis meses de la muerte de su hermano le comunicaron que su madre estaba en cuidados intensivos en el hospital

porque había sufrido de un ataque al corazón. A esta altura Ricardo no sabía qué hacer porque ya había perdido la fe en Dios. Aunque siempre nos pedía que oráramos por la salud de su madre, ya que él no podía hacerlo porque Dios nunca respondía a sus interrogantes. Llego a pensar que tal vez Dios había muerto junto a su hermano. Ricardo pensó en viajar a su país para estar con su madre y apoyar a sus hermanos en esos momentos tan difíciles. Después de reflexionar, pensó que no sería lo mejor, porque nadie más que él podría ayudar para pagar los gastos del hospital, por lo que decidió seguir en este país aunque su corazón siempre se mantuvo junto a ellos. Pocas semanas después le comunicaron que su madre había fallecido. Creo que fue algo que mató a Ricardo en vida, aunque aparentemente era una persona muy fuerte, pero en el fondo estaba dejándose morir poco a poco.

Después de esto, les pidió a sus amigos que no quería ver a nadie, prefería estar solo. Nunca entendí en ese momento porqué tomó esa actitud, pero un poco más adelante logré comprender, aunque ya era demasiado tarde para él. Pocas semanas más tarde recibí una llamada telefónica de Ricardo que decía que necesitaba ayuda, inmediatamente llamé a otro amigo y fuimos a ver que sucedía. Ricardo vivía a 40 minutos de distancia aproximadamente. Cuando llegamos a su casa, la puerta estaba abierta y él estaba tirado en el piso lleno de sangre. De inmediato llamamos a una ambulancia y trasladaron a Ricardo al hospital más cercano. Ahí permaneció en estado de coma por algunos días. Los doctores nos informaron que estaba muy enfermo que tenía leucemia y que era demasiado tarde. Ricardo estaba al borde de la muerte, definitivamente ya no había nada que hacer. Después de permanecer 6 días en estado de coma, volvió a un estado normal, y nos dijo que se sentía muy feliz porque nunca iba a volver a estar solo. Cuando él estuvo apunto de morir, abrió sus ojos y dijo: "Dios ha respondido a todas mis interrogantes y ahora puedo vivir donde se suponía que debería estar" luego cerró sus ojos y murió.

Nosotros enviamos su cuerpo a su país para que sus hermanos le

dieran cristiana sepultura. Estoy segura que para ellos fue un golpe muy fuerte porque Ricardo era un excelente hermano y un soporte para todos ellos. Esa fue la última vez que pude hablar con la familia de Ricardo. Espero que Dios esté con ellos. Me imagino que su madre y su hermano siempre estarán con ellos en cada momento de sus vidas. Esta es una historia que yo conozco, pero me imagino que hay miles de historias que nadie sabe, pero que suceden cada día, aquí y ahora.

The Silence of God

ELVIRA SALAZAR

A few years ago, my friend Ricardo decided to immigrate to this country looking for a better life and the opportunity to help his family whom he left in his country. Ricardo came from a large family; he was one of thirteen brothers and sisters. His father died four years ago when Ricardo was sixteen years old, and according to his customs and traditions, he had to assume the responsibility for his family after his father died.

When he came to this country, he was a young man full of life, dreams, and illusions. He had a very positive, open mind, but at the same time, he had very strong moral background based in the teachings of the Catholic Church. It was because he was raised in a very traditional family where God and church were a very important part of their lives; his faith and strength was based on God and that helped him to leave his country and family and move to a new country with different people, culture, traditions, and language. Once he got here, Ricardo found a job taking care of pigs, he was supposed to work forty hours per week, but some weeks he worked more than one hundred hours, only getting paid for forty. He thought that it was good money and enough to help his family in his country. His big dream was to make enough money to build a house for his mother and brothers and give them a decent life. I am very sure that he loves them because he was always saying good things about them, and I think they love him, too.

He missed his family a lot, maybe because he was living out side of the city, where nobody lives nearby but pigs and turkeys. The only time that he had contact with people was on Sundays when he used to go to church to pray and be with people who remain his family and friends. It was the place where he could feel love and people care for each other. Sundays were the days when he got strength to continue working and helping the loved ones he left behind and hoped that some day he would be with them somewhere forever.

Two years later, one of his younger brothers asked Ricardo for help to

come to this country to be with him and support his family. In the beginning, Ricardo didn't like that idea because his brother was too young, but then he changed his mind and sent money to his bother to pay the "coyote" to help him cross the border. Ricardo was very happy that his brother was coming to be with him. When his brother was on his way to this country, he used to tell himself that he would never be alone again because his brother was coming to be with him. But a couple of weeks later, everything changed when he got a phone call from someone saying that his brother was dead. The caller told him that his brother had been found dead in the desert. It was a terrible thing for Ricardo; he thought it was the end of his life. After his brother died, he never laughed again. He was a very different person, a quiet and sensible person. I never made jokes with him again because he didn't like it anymore. I think the depression got into his spirit; he lost his hope and faith. He used to love God a lot and he had a strong faith, but after that, he used to say, "Where was God when my bother died? Why did He let him die?" He was always asking those kinds of questions, but God never answered him. I think the other thing that worried him was that Ricardo never told his mother and brothers that his brother had died; he was afraid about his mother's health because she used to have heart problems.

Six months later, his mother got very sick. She had a heart attack, and she was at the hospital in his country in intensive care. By this point, Ricardo had lost his faith in God already, so he didn't know what to do, but he asked us to pray for his mom. He could not pray anymore because God never answered him. He thought that he might die like his brother. Ricardo was thinking about going back to his country to see his mom and support his brothers in that hard time. Then he thought it wasn't a good decision because who is going to help with money to pay the hospital for his mom, so he decided to stay in this country. A few weeks later, his mom died. I think this news almost killed him; he seemed to be a very strong person, but he wasn't because he was suffering in his heart.

After this, he didn't want to see any of his friends; he preferred to be alone, I never understood why at that moment, but a few months later, I did,

but by then it was too late. A few weeks later, I got a phone call from him saying that he needed some help, so I called my friend and we went to see him in his house. It was almost forty minutes away. When we got there, the door was opened, and he was on the floor. His nose and mouth were bleeding very badly, so we call the ambulance to take him to the hospital. He was in a coma for a few days. We asked the doctors what happened to him, and they said that he had leukemia and he was going to die very soon because when he got to the hospital it was too late; there was nothing that the doctors could do at that point. After six days, Ricardo regained conscious for a while, and he started talking with us and said that he felt very happy because he would not be alone again. When he was ready to die, he opened his eyes and said, "God answered all of my questions, so now I can live where I was supposed to live." Then, he closed his eyes and died.

We sent Ricardo's body back to his country, and I am very sure that it was very sad for his younger brothers and sisters because he was an excellent brother and he was their only means of support. Since that time, I have never spoken with them again. I hope God is with them and I am very sure that their mom and their brothers are with them every day of their lives. This is only one story that I know but there are thousands of stories like this that nobody knows but happen everyday here and now.

It is New Year's Day. The sun shines brightly through the bedroom window. Joseph groans as he looks at the alarm clock that reads 11:00 a.m. As he squeezes his eyes shut to block out the glare from the sun, he wonders why he drank so much the night before. His head is pounding with intense pain, especially at his temples, and his throat is dry.

Does this sound familiar? Pepsi, the manufacturer of Aquafina bottled water, is betting on it. The advertisement placed in the 2004 year-ending double issue of Sports Illustrated urges readers to open a bottle of water instead of popping a couple of Aspirin. Sports Illustrated has a consumer base that is heaviest among people from twenty-something through fifty-odd and naturally assumes that many of them will be partying over the holiday. Even the most casual drinker will be tempted to indulge. Then again, waking up with a hangover is no one's idea of a great time. Given all of these things, Aquafina has come up with a specific marketing campaign at a strategic time of year geared toward an audience that will relate with hangovers from prior years. The more thought given to this ad, the more genius it appears: creative imaging, impeccable timing, and a message that resonates with truth.

Aquafina's ad hints at a night on the town. There is very little to distract from the product and the message. The street is empty, save a solitary streamer, confetti, and the bottle wearing a top hat in the foreground. The wording on a bright neon sign strongly resembles a typical beer sign and the light from it shines off the pavement. Bright, vivid colors are the only kind present in the ad and one's eyes are automatically drawn to it while flipping through the magazine. It is essential that the visuals and colors in an advertisement grab the attention of the reader to make it an effective marketing tool.

The next step is to have a worthwhile, convincing message. All the colors in the world will not save an ad that does not make sense. This particular ad states, "On New Year's Day, don't open a bottle of aspirin open a bottle of water." To the left of this sits a bottle of Aquafina "decked out" for New Year's and ready to save the day. The bottom of the ad shows a rectangle bearing a striking resemblance to the Surgeon's General Warning, although the message is entirely different. "Make your body happy. Drink more Water," and "This year make a resolution to drink more water. Because the more water you drink, the better you feel." These are the kinds of statements that people love to hear. This ad presents an easy way to feel better.

The repetitive use of the word "water" in this advertisement—six times—leaves no question about which product is being marketed. Then it becomes a question of selling their brand. The marketing department made sure that the ad is devoid of all other brand names but Aquafina's. The bottle is front and center and so sparkingly clear that it reflects the shine from the lights off the street, further illuminating the bottle. Also, because of when and where the ad was placed, it will no doubt get more visibility. The year ending issue of Sports Illustrated is always especially well read because of the football playoffs and all of the collegiate bowl games.

Perhaps one of the most favorable things about the ad is that it accepts that partying is inevitable, especially on New Year's Eve. That was one of the assumptions that the marketers made when focusing on the demographic for Sports Illustrated. From personal experience, I would say that this was a wise decision. I am part of the generation that this ad targets, and I identify with it. For many people, this holiday is about cutting loose and going a little crazy to relieve the stress of Christmas and all the hustle and bustle typical of the season.

All of the familiar symbols in the ad have been manipulated to represent convenient things: the faux Surgeon General's Warning advertising water instead of cigarettes, the beer-type sign pushing water

instead of alcohol, and confetti and streamers indicating celebration. Not only does this ad appear to condone partying and drinking, but it also offers the readers an effective and healthy way of counteracting the night's damage. By offering a simple solution, it almost encourages a reader to go out and indulge. Between the wording in the ad and the reference to a new year, it is like a "get out of jail free card." All too often, that is exactly the kind of justification that we find gratifying.

Another reasonable question would be if this message makes sense. The ad argues that the reader should drink a bottle of Aquafina instead of taking some aspirin after, what is assumed will be, a night of drinking. People do some interesting things to get rid of a hangover. Many people will reach for some type of pain reliever. Others have family remedies such as drinking pickle juice. Some people will say that the best thing for you is "a little hair of the dog that bit ya" and tell you to have another drink first thing to take the edge off. None of these things will really fix the problem, though.

Contrary to popular opinion, hangovers are not caused by drinking too much, but rather by the lack of enough water. Alcoholic and caffeinated beverages both need water to be processed by your body and, therefore, cause dehydration. Dehydration causes many unwanted side effects including "headaches, sore muscles, lethargy, dizziness, and mental fuzziness and loss of appetite"(Brody, "What"). An article from the New York Times informs readers that "The average American consumes a bit more than half of the recommended amount of water each day and an equal amount of dehydrating beverages, which include any drink with caffeine or alcohol"(Brody, "Why").

Employing the idea of a New Year's resolution to drink more water to make your body happy makes this product very attractive. There is also the claim that "the more water you drink, the better you feel." I do not know any people that, if given the option, would not choose to feel better. The question is can they deliver on that claim? The New York Times published an article quoting an international health and fitness

organization called IDEA as saying, "Water regulates body temperature, transports nutrients and oxygen, carries away waste, helps detoxify the kidneys and liver, dissolves vitamins and minerals and cushions the body from injury"(Brody, "What").

There are many positive things in this advertisement. Medical studies have shown that drinking enough water is an essential part of health. Inherently, we know that drinking an excess of alcohol has less-than-pleasant after-effects. Yet, it does not deter us from going out and having a good time. This ad has combined what we believe to be true with what we want to do and that is what makes it so effective. I am now more aware of how much water I drink. So, if I do indulge on New Year's, I have an effective remedy. This ad is a memorable one and Pepsi has succeeded – I do have water on the brain. I guess it is about time to put some Aquafina on my grocery list.

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Mary Oliver: Dignifying Workers in "Singapore"

TRACY CONSTANTINE

Editors' Note: After unsuccessful attempts to get permission to republish Mary Oliver's poem "Singapore" to accompany this essay, the editors chose to publish the essay by itself. The editors highly recommend that before reading this essay you read the referenced poem at the following website:

<http://www.panhala.net/Archive/Singapore.html>

When I first moved from Philadelphia to Jacksonville, I spent much of my orientation gazing up at the lovely, parasitic Spanish moss and looking down at the traffic patterns of large palmetto bugs. In between, when peering straight ahead or over my shoulder, I noticed maids, maids and gardeners, mostly black. As I drove to job interviews, gray-haired tired maids limped long distances to the bus stops where, with pink sweaters draped over forearms, they waited. The older male gardeners, drenched with sweat, leaned on their mowers for a rest. I was embarrassed to see them. I felt I had been transported back to the early 1960s, to the time of Rosa Parks. I began to wonder if our nation had made any progress in the area of civil rights. Then I realized that these people had jobs and I did not! I was the one who felt overlooked and defeated in the workplace; no one would hire me. The maids and gardeners did not appear to be unhappy or mistreated. In fact many of them looked very content and dignified. I was uncomfortable; I could not reconcile external remnants of the past with the personal realities of the present.

In her poem "Singapore," Mary Oliver's speaker faces a similarly humbling experience in an airport restroom. She realizes that "[e]verybody needs a job" to survive (15). To be sure, we all dream of exotic careers and lifestyles. Yet the practical demands of a community require the existence of boring, sometimes unpleasant jobs. Studs Terkel laments, "Most of us have jobs that are too small for our spirit" (vi). Oliver's traveler observes a woman performing a job certainly smaller than most of our spirits: she is cleaning the tops of airport ashtrays in a restroom toilet bowl.

At first, the traveler is disgusted by what she sees. Somewhat

nervous and uncomfortable with the situation, she reaches for the security of her plane ticket -- her ticket back out of the restroom, far away from the woman cleaning ashtrays. Then the cleaning woman turns around and smiles at the traveler. Confronted face to face, the traveler cannot fly away to her own, comfortable world. She must recognize the cleaning woman's existence. More than that, she must recognize their co-existence in that restroom (for that moment) and in the world.

Joyce Carol Oates asserts that this type of tension in Oliver's work "proposes that one lives in two worlds, that of the personal and familial, and that of the impersonal and inhuman. One is lonely in both" (Oates 362). We can describe the personal world of the traveler and the cleaning woman as their humanity: their personal interest in one another. The impersonal world is embodied in their functional roles as "cleaning woman" and "traveler." If each remained hidden behind her impersonal yet functional role, the women would remain alone in their respective personal worlds, but the women smile at one another. This action tears down the wall dividing their personal and impersonal worlds. They embrace one another in a personal fashion, which appears to be a slow yet enlightening step for each woman to take.

Oliver (presumably the speaker) delves deep into the personal world of the cleaning woman in her poem. She speculates that the cleaning woman loves her life. She hopes that the woman will "rise up from the crust and the slop and fly down to the river." She predicts whether or not these things will happen. By writing about the cleaning woman, Oliver assumes the role of one who wishes to reveal a hidden truth about the worker to the rest of the world. The theologian Francis Schussler Fiorenza writes about the challenge he faces when writing about work:

Only hesitatingly does a theologian approach the subject of work. He or she must run the gauntlet set up by August Bebel's often quoted statement that "strictly speaking the worker who drains

sewers to protect humanity from unhealthy miasmas is a very useful member of society, whereas the theologian who seeks to befog the brain with supernatural, transcendental doctrines is an extremely harmful individual."

Bebel's censure offends, but it raises a crucial question: what can a theologian say about work? Can it be anything else but a befogging of the brain with supernatural transcendental doctrines? [. . .] Or can a theologian contribute to a better understanding of work? (Schussler Fiorenza 23)

I would like to suggest that poets might be given the same weight as theologians on Bebel's scale of societal usefulness. The basis for my suggestion is that some readers might consider poetry foggy or unclear, made up of "supernatural, transcendental doctrines." If we substitute the poet, Mary Oliver, for the theologian in Schussler Fiorenza's argument, the crucial question becomes: What can Mary Oliver -- a poet -- say about cleaning ashtray tops in toilet bowls? Can it be anything else but the codified un-telling of her perception of the job? Or can she, Mary Oliver, contribute to a better understanding of the job?

To be sure, in "Singapore," Oliver offers keen insight into the matter of human dignity. Although her traveler is initially disgusted by the cleaning woman, she eventually recognizes "the light that can shine out of a life" (29). She refers to the woman's "beauty" (13) and the distinctive "way she unfolded and refolded the blue cloth" with which she washed the ashtray tops (30). The woman's work is neither slow nor fast, but steady, "like a river" (20). These are thoughtful, respectful observations that compliment the cleaning woman. Ultimately, as Herbert Spiegelberg writes, "'Treating someone with dignity' does not imply that dignity is a means or a way of using such a means. Its primary sense is 'to treat someone with respect for his dignity'" (55). Oliver respects the serious

manner in which the woman proceeds with cleaning the ashtray tops. She honors her for taking pride in her work.

Oliver might otherwise respond to my challenge with lines from her poem entitled "What is it?": "[A]nd how could anyone believe / that anything in this world / is only what it appears to be [?]" (2). Indeed, how could anyone believe that the airport incident is only a social statement about the human dignity of every individual? Oliver turns the incident into an occasion for telling about her poetry -- in effect, an opportunity to dignify her own profession. She begins by juxtaposing her appalling run-in with the cleaning woman with an optimistic recipe for a poem.

A poem should always have birds in it.

Kingfishers, say, with their bold eyes and gaudy wings.

Rivers are pleasant, and of course trees.

A waterfall, or if that's not possible, a fountain rising and falling.

A person wants to stand in a happy place, in a poem.

(lines 7-11)

Not only does a person want to stand in a happy place in a poem, but also in life. People want to be comforted by what they read. They want to read poems that make their lives happier. At this point, I am reminded of Donald Justice's "Poem," in which he advises the reader: "Your type of beauty has no place here [in the poem] . . . / And do not look for any illumination . . . / And there is nothing in it to comfort you" (Justice 284). Justice assigns the poem a private life and purpose of its own. It does not contain the material beauty a reader may wish to find in it. In fact, he discourages the reader from placing personal expectations upon the poem.

Oliver suggests that the pursuit of happiness should align with poet Richard Wilbur's definition: "the pursuit of self-realization, or of full human life" (Wilbur 469). To promote this type of happiness, poems

"should always have" symbols that will add to the overall enlightenment of the human being and that will contribute to the improvement of human life.

Therefore, unlike Justice, Oliver invites the reader into her poems. Certainly, sometimes we all find ourselves in airport restrooms face to face with cleaning people. Oliver realizes that life is not made up of only bright blue birds, pleasant rivers, and steady waterfalls. Neither, then, should poems be made up of only idyllic images. She works toward a balance of comfortable and uncomfortable images in her poem -- not to comfort the reader, but to open the reader's eyes to the reality around him or her.

Similarly, Oliver affirms the unpredictability, the unevenness of life when she wonders: "If the world were only pain and logic, who would want it?" (16). Then she goes one step further: she invites the reader to open his or her eyes. In the final lines of the poem, Oliver charges the reader to recognize the positive images that do indeed lurk beneath seemingly bleak surfaces.

Neither do I mean anything miraculous, but only
the light that can shine out of a life. I mean
the way she unfolded and refolded the blue cloth,
the way her smile was only for my sake; I mean
the way this poem is filled with trees, and birds. (28-32)

What, in the first two stanzas of "Singapore," Oliver separates as a juxtaposition of undesirable and desirable situations, she weaves together in the final stanza. There are bright blues and birds and rivers in this poem about a restroom. The cleaner's cloth is blue; "[h]er dark hair is like the wing of a bird" (21); she works neither slowly nor quickly, "but like a river."

When Oliver's Traveler recognizes these symbolic references to nature, "a darkness [is] ripped from [her] eyes" (2). She is able to see "the light that can shine out of a life." Deirdre G. Callanan states that "time and

again [Oliver's] figures transubstantiate, or metamorphose, through light" (249). Oliver believes her responsibility as a poet is to shed light on the wonders -- and inequalities -- of nature present in all people and situations.

If, as Sol Chaneles writes, "[t]he dignity of others derives less from being themselves than from encouraging you to be yourself," then the cleaning woman is a catalyst that enables the traveler in "Singapore" to do her own work with greater personal integrity. If, then, we assume that the traveler, the "I" in the poem, is indeed Mary Oliver, we can say that the dignity of the ashtray cleaner is rooted in the way she has affected Oliver to reflect on human dignity and the workplace. Without saying a word, the cleaning woman inspires personal growth in Oliver.

When the woman turned I could not answer her face.
Her beauty and her embarrassment struggled together,
and neither could win.
She smiled and I smiled. What kind of nonsense is this?
Everybody needs a job. (12-15)

In turn, Oliver's dignity comes from her ability to affect the reader. She "has a great deal to offer anyone who has a capacity for being proud to be alive" (CA). By encouraging the reader to consider the true beauty, the humanity, of the cleaning woman, she enhances our potential for "a full human life."

Reading "Singapore" is an uplifting experience. The poem is a tribute to many under-appreciated, under-valued workers. In effect, Oliver proffers that the ashtray cleaner -- like all other workers -- is herself a poem. She is the bird, the river, the fountain, the waterfall. And just as she made the traveler happy, in Wilbur's sense of the word, she is capable of making the reader happy.

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How Can the Government Help Pay College Costs?

MICHAEL W. ROACHE

The financial advantages of a college education have been discussed and documented for many years. The annual income advantage of college graduates over high school graduates ranges from 25.6% for Associate's degree holders to 260% for professional degree holders (Day and Newburger 2). Why, then, do so many people not go to college? Education is getting more expensive each year. Tuition hikes, along with the rising costs of books and fees, make it more difficult to pay for college. On average, the annual cost of post-secondary schooling, both public and private, ranges from \$7,780 for the first two years of college to \$13,518 for postgraduate level tuition (Bogges and Ryan 11). Over the next eighteen years, the average cost of a four-year public college is expected to reach \$96,000. Five dollars a day deposited into either a savings account or cookie jar will only cover about half of this expense (Schiffres). The tax-advantaged 529 plans available for college savings are an economically sound investment, but can only be taken advantage of if one has the means to deposit into these programs. Student loans, grants, and scholarships are a necessary part of most students' college preparation. The repayment of these loans is an ongoing issue for most graduates, and millions of dollars of student loans have been defaulted. How can the burden of paying for an education be alleviated? Options include raised taxes, increased accessibility to grants and loans, and tax credits for education. The tuition that one pays is an investment in his or her future. Can the government help with this investment?

Property taxes are a main source of funding for kindergarten through high school education. This method of funding is spread across all properties within a district. No exception is granted to the elderly, those who have no children, businesses that have no interest or requirement to send young students to school, or persons that are paying to send a member of their family to either a private school or post-secondary institution. How could increased property taxes help pay for

college and help make an investment in the community? Such an increase could provide a targeted source of funds for post-secondary schooling. The difficulty with this proposal is convincing voters to pass a tax increase to fund education for someone other than the children of the community. The operating budgets of state universities and community colleges are funded by state budgets. State lotteries have increased the available revenue for some states' school systems. Education spending referendums have been proposed in many counties to improve the physical properties of primary and secondary schools. Repeatedly, these ballots have been voted down and viewed as too expensive and shortsighted. The proposal to increase taxes to pay for some level of post-secondary education would not make it to the ballot if such a proposal were seriously considered. Increasing the mandatory payments for someone else's voluntary schooling would make fiscal conservatives pale.

Federally guaranteed student loans and grants have been the lifeblood of many students. During President George W. Bush's administration, there have been increases in the amount of Pell Grant funds available for students. Already there has been \$1 billion approved by Congress to supplement this fund, which represents a portion of the \$3 billion requested by the President. If the complete amount were approved, the number of students who would benefit from these grants would increase by nearly one half-million. As there are many displaced workers in the United States who have been forced to return to school due to the lethargic economy, these funds would help some of these people to receive training for new careers. The President has signed a law to keep Stafford student loans at a low interest rate, some as low as 4.06 %. The default rate on these loans enjoyed a 75% decrease from 1990 through 1999. The slowdown in the economy has shown a slight effect on this indicator, which for fiscal year 2000 was at 5.9%. In addition to the increase in Pell Grant monies and Stafford student loan attention, this administration has done several things to help those going to school by enacting legislation that will:

- Eliminate the 60-month limitation on student loan interest deductions and increase the income levels of individuals able to claim the deduction, thus making the tax benefit simpler to administer and increasing the affordability of student loan repayment;
- Increase the annual limit on contributions to education savings accounts from \$500 to \$2,000;
- Add a new above-the-line deduction for qualified higher education expenses;
- Allow tax-free distributions from Qualified Tuition Plans (Section 529 plans) used to pay education expenses and permit private institutions to offer such plans; and
- Make the income exclusion for employer-provided education assistance permanent and extend the benefit of the exclusion to graduate-level courses. (United States Dept. of Education)

Clearly, a focus has been placed on helping families and individuals who want to pursue higher education. After reviewing these programs, one could ask if the government has done enough to encourage education and invest in its citizens' futures. Could it do more?

Deductions are allowed for childcare, business expenses, mortgage interest, and the list continues. These deductions fuel a segment of the economy that has for its sole purpose the exploitation of these exceptions. How can the "average family" benefit from one additional deduction? By allowing the deduction of all education expenses (within reasonable guidelines), the federal government would make an investment in itself that would pay handsomely in the future. According the U.S. Census Bureau, the average family (hereinafter referred to as "the" family) in the United States consists of 3.14 persons with a mean family income of \$50,046 (DP-1; DP-3). The same bureau has found that education costs of tuition, books, and room and board average \$12,173 nationwide (Boggess

and Ryan 7). If "the" family were to take advantage of the current allowable education expense deductions and available tax credits, following the instructions from the Internal Revenue Service for forms 1040a and 8863, their federal income tax amount would be \$2,509 for the first two years of a four-year program, rising to \$4,009 for the remaining two years. However, if the complete annual cost were deductible, their tax responsibility would be \$1636 and \$2,636, respectively. The cost to the federal government would average \$5,492 over four years (Table 1).

Every investment is made with an expectation of a profitable return. How would this be recognized? Statistics show the income disparity between high school and college graduates. Using the median income of both groups, the average holder of a Bachelor's degree makes \$21,800 more per year than the comparable high school graduate. This translates into an increased tax responsibility of \$5,289 per year, effectively paying a profit to the government in less than the four years that it invested in tax benefits to the family (Table 2). The figures used do not factor the savings in state taxes that would be enjoyed by the student's family as well as the return to the state treasury after graduation. There are, of course, several factors to be considered in addition to the simple deduction of education expenses. Tax advocates as well as the Internal Revenue Service have sufficient experts in the field to fine-tune such a proposal. While this proposal would benefit those who seek a better standard of living for themselves, the net increase in average income of individuals and families would increase the amount collected to fund the government.

A recession affects people at all income levels. Those who have struggled to make a living so that they can provide an education for their children or themselves should be rewarded for their hard work. Increased property taxes could provide funds to offset the expense of college, but public consensus would not allow such a measure to be enacted. The government has enacted several initiatives to help those who want to pursue a higher education, which include providing tax credits and

deductions, stabilizing student loan interest rates, and adding funds to the Pell Grant system. By taking the additional step of allowing all education expenses to be deducted, the government would provide relief to more families and individuals who seek an education to secure rewarding employment and a higher standard of living. In a relatively short time, a return would be realized from the investment made in America and her citizens.

Table 1

Summary of Data Used to Calculate Cost of Proposed Tax Deduction

	Current Tax	Proposed Tax
First 2 years of college	\$2,509	\$1,136
Last 2 years of college	\$4,009	\$2,636
Total tax 4 years	\$13,036	\$7,544
	<u>Savings/Investment</u>	
	\$5,492	

Table 2

Income and Tax Disparity Between High School and College Graduates

	High School Graduate	College Graduate
Average Income	\$30,400	\$52,200
Tax Responsibility	\$3,146	\$8,435
	<u>Tax Difference/Return on Investment</u>	
	\$5,289	

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Dendrobatid Frog Endangerment, Decline, and Sustainability

JEFF METTE

Editors' Note: Many Durham Technical Community College students are required to give oral presentations in their classes. The editors elected to include this work in our journal in order to honor this style of presentation. Please note that this piece is and never intended to be anything more than the notes for an oral presentation.

Endangered Species

Human activity is causing the extinction of many forms of life. Generally speaking, there are five major causes of extinction. In the approximate order of their impact on biodiversity, these causes are destruction of habitat, displacement by introduced species, alteration of habitat by chemical pollutants, hybridization with other species or subspecies, and over-harvesting (from Wilson).

The destruction of tropical rain forest represents the largest single contributor to the process of declining biodiversity. One reason for this is the latitudinal diversity gradient, which states that biodiversity is greater at earth's equator and lesser at its poles. This gradient is evident in surveys of anuran (frog and toad) fauna from the following six sites (from Duellman):

George Reserve, Michigan	42E North	8 species
University of Kansas Reservation	39E North	9 species
Brazos County, Texas	31E North	11 species
Tehuantepec, Mexico	16E North	17 species
Barro Colorado island, Panama	9E North	19 species
Santa Cecilia, Ecuador	0E North	81 species

Generally speaking, the reverse of this gradient can also be applied to

national economies.

Worldwide, poorer and less stable nations are closer to the equator than wealthy and developed ones. Furthermore, poor nations put greater pressure on their natural resources, and rely on them more heavily. They are less able to exclude the five major causes of extinction from their economic and agricultural systems. Protective legislation is less likely to exist or be enforced.

This means that, generally speaking, the nations least able to conserve their biological resources are those that contain the greatest biodiversity.

Amphibian Decline

Amphibian (frogs, toads, salamanders, and caecilians) populations are in drastic decline worldwide. Large numbers of species are going extinct or becoming greatly reduced in number.

Although the five major causes of extinction apply to amphibians, they also suffer from some more specific problems (from Crump): abnormal weather patterns such as El Niño, ultraviolet radiation, and especially the parasitic fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*.

The Chytrid fungus *B. dendrobatidis* is found on every continent except the Asian mainland and Antarctica (from Speare). It has been implicated in large amphibian die offs in Europe, Australia, USA, and Central America.

The family Dendrobatidae

Dendrobatid (or Poison Dart) frogs occur in Central and South America from Nicaragua to Bolivia.

This diverse family consists of several hundred species ranging in size from 10mm to 80mm, with a great variety of body shapes, color patterns,

and life histories. The family Dendrobatidae occupies a broad range of habitats and includes both specific microhabitat specialists and some generalists adaptable to altered or fragmented habitats.

Dendrobatid frogs face serious threat of extinction throughout their natural range. All of the five major causes of biodiversity decline apply, as well as the three specific causes of rapid amphibian population decline.

Dendrobates aboreus lives only in a small area of the central Panamanian highlands and is a strict canopy dweller rarely found below 10m. It faces an immediate threat of extinction as its habitat is rapidly being converted to pasture for cattle production.

Phyllobates terribilis, a large yellow frog found in the Columbian Choco, is the most poisonous animal on earth. The volatility of Columbian politics seriously reduces the likelihood of conservation efforts while exposing it another potential threat: the effects of war.

Epipedobates tricolor occurs in montane forest and some disturbed areas in southwestern Ecuador and is the source of a powerful pharmaceutical chemical. The state of Ecuadorian forests west of the Andes is dire, placing this species at substantial risk.

Dendrobates speciosus is now thought to be extinct due to the near total conversion of its habitat on the pacific slope of Panama to cattle pasture.

Minyobates steyermarki is found only on the top of an isolated tepui mountain in Amazonian Venezuela. Its extremely limited range makes it especially vulnerable to the sudden population declines associated with illegal collections for the exotic animal trade.

The deadly parasitic fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* has decimated captive collections of Dendrobatid frogs in Europe and is now found within the natural range of the family Dendrobatidae, where it has been implicated in population declines.

Dendrobatid frogs have economic significance and represent a potentially lucrative biological resource for those countries where they occur. Dendrobatid frogs command a high price in the international exotic pet market and the defensive chemicals produced by these frogs are recognized as a valuable pharmaceutical resource. These resources, however, have typically been exploited only to the economic benefit of the developed nations of North America and Europe. Furthermore, current methods of bringing this and many other biological resources into the marketplace lack sustainability. In order to preserve Dendrobatid frog faunas, a social and economic incentive must be available to the countries where they occur.

The ZIRAN Program

Rainer Schulte, a German biologist working in Peru, developed the ZIRAN program to address all aspects of Dendrobatid frog endangerment. ZIRAN has already proved successful, and World Bank, as well as private investors in North America, Europe, and Japan, is now funding expansion. The ultimate goal of the program is to create one management site for each species and subspecies in the family Dendrobatidae (from Schulte). Currently there are about 60 management sites (from GEF).

The ZIRAN program represents a new form of income for rural Latin Americans, one that relies on the preservation, not exploitation, of biological resources. The central function of the program is to increase the density of naturally occurring Dendrobatid frog populations, so as to

support harvest for export. This is achieved with minimal labor and financial investment and is run similarly to single-family subsistence agriculture. Original rainforest habitat containing endemic Dendrobatid species is protected for use as management sites. Participants protect the management sites, harvest young frogs, maintain breeding conditions for the adult population, and profit from export sales. The on-site frog populations are managed so that exports do not reduce natural population levels. Furthermore, program activities are non-invasive; they create minimal impact on the sites themselves and no degradation or destruction of off-site natural or biological resources (from Schulte).

Legal exportations from ZIRAN plots can undercut smuggled animals in the marketplace and have the potential to eliminate unmanaged harvests of wild frogs (provided ZIRAN reaches full implementation). The local economic potential is outlined in the following hypothetical situation (from GEF): A valley has 2 endemic Dendrobatid frog species and 10 participating families. Twenty-five frogs are exported monthly from each species, bringing 25 US\$ per frog to the valley. Each family sells five frogs, earning 125 US\$ monthly, approximately triple the average rural income. A non-governmental labor union has been formed to organize the rural producers of Dendrobatid frogs in Peru.

Conclusion

The ZIRAN program teaches both Dendrobatid frog production and sustainable agriculture methods to participating families, providing locals with a realistic alternative to the exploitative practices of drug production and slash-and-burn agriculture. Ultimately, by attaching a socioeconomic benefit to the preservation of biological resources, ZIRAN makes preservation a realistic priority for those that live in the biologically rich but economically depressed range of the family Dendrobatidae.

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Symbolism In *The Wizard of Oz*

M A L

There are many aspects beyond those technical ones in the famous movie *The Wizard of Oz*. In many instances, these are merely myths that have persisted through time. In order to gain a full understanding and correct interpretation of these fables, it is necessary to consider each of the following four elements in depth: religion, sexuality, politics, and other legends. Even if these ideas, as posited, are not the real meanings behind the *Wizard*, it is still a story told by a man, L. Frank Baum, a father, someone who cannot extract himself from his cultural interpretations and individual life experiences. So each, in its own way, comes out through his story, and each reader or viewer, in turn, attributes his or her own expectations and experiences to this story.

"I'd tell you what I think of you but I'm a Christian woman." This quote, from Auntie Em to Almira Gulch, is the only explicit reference to religion in *The Wizard of Oz*. Yet writers and researchers alike have insisted that a spiritual theme exists. According to William Bausch, a spiritual journey includes holy discontent, the call, beginning the venture, insight, and allies. Because each of these elements is present within *The Wizard of Oz* many Christians see the story as the ultimate example of a spiritual journey. Dorothy's desire to know what lies "over the rainbow" was her discontent, and the tornado served as a call, and along the way she confronted her "demons"— "lions and tigers and bears, oh my!" (Bausch 16). *The Wizard of Oz* has not been limited to a Christian analysis, however. Joey Green suggests that the story is illustrative of the Buddhist search for enlightenment (Green 22). He compares Glenda the good witch to the Zen master, sending Dorothy down the yellow brick road toward enlightenment. Her search for discovery inspires others along the way. Eventually, Dorothy finds oneness with the Universe, expressed in her finding her way home. Her slippers represent the "inner spark" within each of us, and "Follow the yellow brick road" serves as her mantra. Her return home symbolizes her ultimate enlightenment. This

story has also been criticized as a New Age pilgrimage, a secular myth, and a look at organized religion in general. Further, the desire to find something 'over the rainbow' is symbolic of the escapism that organized religion provides (Downing 28). It is unclear at what point this story became a spiritual staple, but it is possible that it started as an example of spiritual journeys or a voyage to enlightenment and over time catapulted into a belief in itself. Regardless, it is clear that religion is but one instance of applying cultural norms to *The Wizard of Oz*.

Sexuality plays many roles within *The Wizard of Oz*. Many of these themes revolve around the pivotal role of the family: mother, father, and giving birth. The most sexual of these examples is Daniel Derwin's review of the "primal scene." According to Derwin, Dorothy walked in on Auntie Em and Uncle Henry having sex. The anxiety of this event manifests itself in the form of a tornado. Derwin believes this is "A remarkably apt representation of the paternal phallus in its swollen, twisting, penetrating state..." (Derwin 44). Dorothy is carried off into dreamland where real life companions appear in altered forms, as she progresses down the yellow brick road of sexual development. The wizard, supposedly a "wind bag" demands the broom from the wicked witch, which is suppose to symbolize restoring the phallus of "father." This return is indicative of her growing sexual knowledge. The wizard being exposed as human is reflected as Dorothy's realization that sex is natural. Further, by helping her friends to achieve their desire to become human, she symbolically gives birth. This view, typically Freudian, focuses on male genitalia rather than actual relationships.

Harvey Greenberg chooses to look at the role of the mother. He believes that *The Wizard of Oz* is a metaphor for the coming of age process adolescents go through (Greensberg 27). For example, Dorothy wants to leave the farm but is apprehensive about moving from dependence to independence. He also notes that as an orphan, she has an unnatural tie to her aunt and uncle, and that 'Em' alludes to M, as in Mother. According to Greenberg, the focus of story is on mother, as the

men are ineffectual (Greensburg 24). Her feelings toward Auntie Em are ambivalent, as is played out in the *Wizard*. They are split between the Good Mother, Glenda, who wants for Dorothy to figure out on her own what she needs, and the Bad Mother, the Wicked Witch of the West, who tries to keep Dorothy dependent on her. These views are both heteronormative, but *The Wizard of Oz* has found itself as an icon for the gay community as well. Alexander Doty interprets Dorothy's dream voyage as a young lesbian's search for her identity (Doty 96). He believes the female characters represent the extremes of sexual identity. Auntie Em and Glenda are both symbolic of the traditionally femme role, with Almira Gulch and the Wicked Witch as their butch counterparts. Further, the rainbow flag symbolizing diversity is strongly associated with Judy Garland's rendition of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." These views, each very different in their orientation, all point to sexuality as being a main theme within *The Wizard of Oz*.

Sexuality and religion are not the only themes to be considered inside *The Wizard of Oz*, as politics have also been a featured theme. The moving force behind a political interpretation to *The Wizard of Oz* is actually the wizard himself. The mythical character represents an all-powerful being that, in the end, is actually powerless, and a mere human. Baum gives the fictitious account of an adolescent who can either trust the Good Witch and follow her own path, or believe that the Wizard will take care of all the problems. In the end, Dorothy realizes that she cannot depend on one person-one man-and that she must lead herself. This book came at the end of the populist period, and can be seen as an attempt to move away from the federal government and larger institutions toward individual and team efforts (Swaim 22). The book was written during this time, when the populist movement was slowly losing steam. The populists eventually lost their constituency, as it was too divided among the farmers and the industrialists- the scarecrow and the tin man. Another similar element is the yellow brick road, symbolic of the gold standard that the populists were trying to get rid of. Another popular

political interpretation was put forth by Professor Henry Littlefield. Also based on the populist movement, Littlefield's view focuses more on the election of 1896. He also drew the analogy between the scarecrow, who wasn't smart enough to recognize his best interests, and the tin man, dehumanized by factory work and rusted solid by the depression of 1893. Littlefield went further with his analysis, though. He believed that the cowardly lion represented William Bryan, the democratic nominee for president in 1896 and endorsed by the Populist Party. The lion's strike out against the tin man, which failed to cause a dent in his metal body, was supposedly meant to symbolize Bryan's failure to win the vote of industrial workers. The journey to Oz to visit the wizard is symbolic of a trip to Washington, DC, to visit the president. Further, in the original story the Emerald City wasn't green at all, but a bland white, and the wizard appeared to each character as a different entity—a beast, a ball of fire, a fairy, and a giant head—just as politicians try to be all things to all people. The water used to kill the Wicked Witch is symbolic of the end of the drought that the farmers had been suffering at the time. Finally, the ruby slippers were originally silver shoes that would solve Dorothy's dilemma, just as the coinage of free silver would solve the dilemma of the farmers. In the end, when the wizard is exposed as a common man, Dorothy returns home and the slippers are gone, as is the belief that big government will solve all problems and the hope for the future of silver (Littlefield 50). Another visionary reader, Russell Nye, saw Oz as Baum's utopian vision of America. This Emerald City was free from disease and poverty where only selfless people lived. Further interpretations include Toto as prohibitionists, and Oz as the abbreviation for ounce, the measurement used for both silver and gold. Finally, several philosophers on *The Wizard of Oz* have observed the political realm within Oz, but maintain that Baum was strictly apolitical, and if anything satirizing the process rather than criticizing it (Nye 7).

There are many areas of interest surrounding *The Wizard of Oz* on which there has been less research.. According to Joe Baltake of the

Sacramento Bee, *The Wizard of Oz* served as "...the definitive head film..." for counterculture through the late 1960's and into the early 1970's. Accordingly, hippies interpreted Dorothy's trip down the yellow brick road as merely an acid trip, her ruby slippers as the last fix, and the hot air balloon as a rehab of sorts. This drug reference most likely began when the Wicked Witch sent Dorothy and her companions through the poppy fields where they are put to sleep (Earle 131). This is not the only counterculture fable, however, circulating around the *Wizard*. One long-held myth states that, after Dorothy, Toto, and the scarecrow encounter the Wicked Witch, a munchkin can be seen hanging himself from a tree. What is actually visible are dozens of birds escaping from another set. The entire journey down the yellow brick road was actually filmed before the little people were brought in, as these people were needed at both the beginning and the end of the movie, and were taped after all other filming had been completed. It is unknown where this myth originated, but it has persisted through time (Harmetz 78). It is apparent that this children's book-turned-movie became a cultural marker for several decades following its original release. What is more surprising, however, is how the story has made its way into the hearts and songs of viewers some fifty years out. *The Wizard of Oz* has been included in many contemporary songs, including Elton John's "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road," Aerosmith's "The Farm," Bon Jovi's "Mystery Train," and The Seekers' "Emerald City," to name just a few (Bailey 18). In short, this movie has served many roles in the minds of viewers, from political commentary to popular culture, and has certainly surpassed the expected goal of mere entertainment.

Those analyzing *The Wizard of Oz* have been quick to give it alternate meanings, as well as to reject any such belief. It has been said that the author, Baum, wrote it purely for entertainment value, a child's book free from any moral, religious, political, or other considerations. It is being put forth, here and now, that to write even a short memo without including the cultural bias that envelops us all in our day-to-day life would be impossible. Even if Baum had no meanings in his book other than a

nice story for children, the plot was influenced at least in part by his life experiences, and interpreted by the realities of future consumers.

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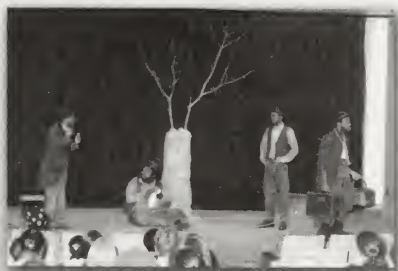
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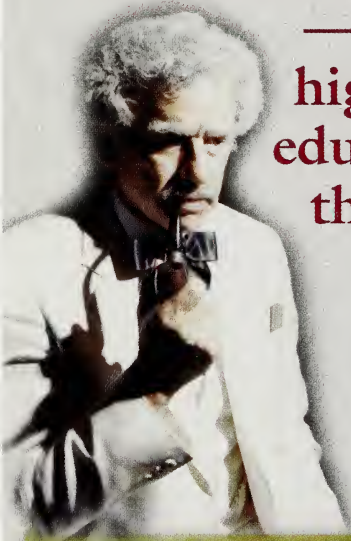
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